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# COOLIE:

## The Story of Labour and Capital in India

BY

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# SLAVES

## OF THE

# TEA PLANTATIONS.

In the month of June, 1931, the annual Assam dinner was held in London and the Chairman, Lt.-Col. A. H. C. Sutherland, who is also the Chairman of the Indian Tea Association, the central organization of the employers in Assam, in his speech stated that he hoped that the members of the Royal Commission on Labour had taken a "rapid grasp of the fact that the tea industry stands alone among enterprises in the East, and that its organization and the conduct of the business generally is of such a high order as to place it far above the plane of industrial undertakings, for whose benefit Royal Commissions are usually convened."

And he went on to state that he hoped that "members of the Commission found conditions in the tea districts beyond criticism, and that consequently we can have nothing to fear from their report."

My object is to see how far the hopes entertained by the Chairman of the Indian Tea Association could be justified. At the same dinner the chief guest was the Chairman of the Royal Commission, the Right Hon'ble J. H. Whitley, who, addressing the guests assembled, stated :—

"You have achieved wonderful things in the eighty years or so since the beginning of the tea industry in Assam, and I think you would be the last to say that everything that could be done has already been done.

"At any rate we all of us, as I have said, are full of admiration for what you have achieved already in your industry, and look forward to seeing many of your difficulties removed out of your way. We look forward to seeing

**"Achieved wonders."** the industry as a great whole, taking a pride in its work so that it may not merely be the Garden Province of India, as I have said, but that it may also perhaps be the greatest single contributor to the wealth and welfare of the Indian people.....So that in, addition to the wonderful commodity that you produce, you have the happiness of seeing your work producing health and

happiness and independence for tens of thousands of the humblest people among the people of India.

“ Then, again, you have among the people who are, for the time being, workers on your great estates many, who have come to you in the hope of better lives and better conditions than they have it possible to enjoy in their homelands, and you have done much to let them achieve the hopes with which they came to you.”

Let us see how the actual facts bear out these rosy estimates.

In the year 1834 an Official Committee was appointed to report on the possibility of introducing the cultivation of tea into India.

### **First Experiments.**

As a result of the Report of this Committee, Government in 1835 attempted to establish planting concerns of their own.

In that year an experimental plantation was started in the Lakhimpur District of Assam. Unfortunately that experiment then was not an entire success, although today the Lakhimpur District is one of the most flourishing in India in the matter of tea production. Undaunted by this failure, another plantation was started soon after and eventually sold in 1840 to the Assam Company which had been founded a year previous. This corporation became one of the biggest tea-planting companies in Assam. The plantation of tea received a good deal of stimulus from the year 1850 onwards. In 1855 the first garden was started in the Cachar District of the Surma Valley and later tea plantation was introduced into the District of Sylhet. In 1859 this industry had survived all disasters and received great support from a boom which definitely assured its future.

It is estimated\* that eighty per cent. of the total area under tea in India lies in Assam (in the Brahmaputra and Surma Valleys) and in the two contiguous districts (Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri)

### **Statistics.**

of Northern Bengal, which supply eighty per cent. of the total Indian production of tea. The elevated region over the Malabar Coast in Southern India (including the State of Travancore and the districts of Malabar, Nilgiris, and Coimbatore) contributes over 12 per cent. of the total. The total number of plantations is 851 in Assam, 317 in Bengal and 324 in Southern India.

The average size of a plantation varies from 546 acres in Bengal to 471 acres in Travancore. In other provinces like Bihar and Orissa, the average is much smaller, being 175 acres in Madras, 159 acres in the United Provinces and 96 acres in Bihar and Orissa until we get down to the Punjab where the average area is about 4 acres. If we take the decennial average of area and

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\* Report on the Production of Tea in India, 1919, Page 1.

production at 100 for the years 1901 to 1910, then the variation in cultivation from 1910 to 1919 shews that between those years the area under cultivation has gone up from 105 in 1910 to 129 in 1919 and production has gone up from 115 in 1910 to 165 in 1919. The average production per acre of tea is about 600 lbs. The total production of black and green tea is shewn in the accompanying table.

### DEVELOPMENT OF TEA INDUSTRY IN INDIA. (Shewn at specific periods.)

| Year | Acreage<br>(in thousands) | Production<br>(million lbs.) | Export<br>(million lbs.) |
|------|---------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1897 | 470                       | 154                          | 150                      |
| 1910 | 564                       | 263                          | 251                      |
| 1920 | 704                       | 345                          | 382                      |
| 1928 | 773                       | 404                          | 365                      |

The latest report (the Review of Agricultural operations in India for 1927-1928) reveals the fact that 81 per cent of the total area under tea in India is in Assam including the two contiguous districts of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri of Northern Bengal. In 1927 the area, i.e. 752,900 acres of tea bush was nearly 2 per cent. larger than in 1926. The yield worked out at 390,920,000 lbs. at the rate of 562 lbs. per acre plucked. The exports by sea amounted to 362 million lbs. valued at 32.48 lakhs while in addition 9 million lbs. left by land.

|                        | Acreage | Production<br>million of<br>pounds. | Export<br>million of<br>pounds. |
|------------------------|---------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| The 1928 figures are : | 773,000 | 404                                 | 365                             |

The total number of persons employed in the tea industry in 1919 appears to be 973,400 out of which 72,700 were employed temporarily. The complete list province by province is as follows :—

### PERSONS EMPLOYED. (Daily average)

|                  | Garden<br>Labour<br>(Permanent) | Outside<br>Labour<br>(Permanent) | Outside<br>Labour<br>(Temporarily) |
|------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Assam ...        | 634,310                         | 26,154                           | 45,113                             |
| Bengal ...       | 150,270                         | 4,861                            | 6,251                              |
| Bihar & Orissa   | 695                             | 1,267                            | 45                                 |
| United Provinces | 2,339                           | 2,211                            | 1,301                              |
| Punjab ...       | 1,201                           | 3,228                            | 10,203                             |
| Madras ...       | 13,160                          | 12,423                           | 4,837                              |
| Travancore...    | 44,677                          | 697                              | 4,840                              |
| Burmah ...       | ...                             | 3,225                            | 70                                 |
| <b>Total ...</b> | <b>846,652</b>                  | <b>54,046</b>                    | <b>72,660</b>                      |

The total resident labour force in tea estates in 1927-28 consisted of 585,104 adults and 440,117 children. From 1923 to 1928 the number of men, women and children imported for the tea industry has varied between a little over 33,000 and a little less than 46,000 every year. Most of this labour force in the tea estates is employed out of doors. The birthrate on an average for the year 1927-28 in the Assam Valley was 32.4 per mile and the death rate 20.61.

The average monthly earnings of labourers both Act and non-Act labourers (although in the year 1919 it was stated that there were practically no Act-labourers to be found in Assam) were as follows for 1919:—

### Truth about wages

#### Monthly Wages.

|                    |                      | Rs. | As. | Ps. |
|--------------------|----------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Non-Act labourers. | { Men . . . . .      | 6   | 12  | 10  |
|                    | { Women . . . . .    | 5   | 14  | 3   |
|                    | { Children . . . . . | 3   | 7   | 7   |
| Average . . . . .  |                      | 5   | 6   | 3   |

The facts to remember in calculating these average wages are:—

(1) That these wages have been calculated during September to March, a prosperous and an unprosperous month for the workers;

(2) That these are not the actual cash wages paid. Allowance is made in reckoning these wages for *ticca* (which is overtime), diet, rations, subsistence allowance and bonus per head of the total number on the books, whether actually present or not.

(3) A full working day month is reckoned as the basis for this calculation and it is obvious that, as there are cases of absenteeism due to illness and other causes, this average, that has been worked out, has no connection with the real state of wages obtained by the workers on the tea plantations.

In 1919 there were 128 Tea Companies incorporated in India which have an aggregate paid-up capital of Rs. 6.80 crores. Some have declared a divi dend of 22% and others of 20%. Sixty-four Companies for which data were available for pre-war years and for the year 1919 showed that these Companies declared dividends in 1913 of 20%, in 1918 of 27% and in 1919 of 21% on the ordinary paid-up capital. The total amount of capital sunk in tea production by the Joint Stock Companies up to 1919 amounted to 34 crores. Out of these the Companies incorporated in India had a capital of Rs. 6,80,13,933 and those incorporated in the United Kingdom had a capital of £ 18,259,264.\*

### Capital

In 1928 the capital invested was:

Rs. 12 crores—Indian incorporation.

Rs. 36 crores.. British incorporation.

Total                      48 crores.

123 companies incorporated in India with a total capital of 4.53 crores declared aggregate dividends of 32 % in 1927 and 95 companies with a total of 3.82 crores, also incorporated in India, declared aggregate dividends of 23 %.

The share value for 136 companies in 1927 of a hundred rupees share was 285; and of 134 companies Rs. 332 in 1928; and of 135 companies Rs. 303 in 1929.

In 1903 an Act known as the Indian Tea Cess Act, IX of 1903, was passed at the request of the Tea Industry. Its object was to levy a duty of a quarter pie per lb. on all Indian tea exported. By this means, a sum of nearly Rs. 5 lakhs was collected by Government and handed over to a Tea Cess Fund to be administered by a Committee for furthering consumption of tea in India. This was a case in which a flourishing industry, instead of utilising a portion of the enormous dividends earned by it for furthering production and marketing of tea, has, by means of the assistance given to it by Government, been able to conserve its entire profits and pass on the burden of the funds necessary for carrying on propaganda, to the average consumer. As to what moral justification Government had in assenting to such an imposition upon the consumer, is a question which requires no answer.

It is worthy of note that the cry in Assam, ever since the boom in the tea industry set in, way back in the fifties, has been labour and more labour, from the lips of every garden proprietor. The history of slave legislation, which dominated the Province of Assam as well as other Provinces from which recruited workers for Assam were obtained by the employers, amply supports the argument that frantic attempts were made by the employers to organise their recruitment of labour, there being practically no labour available in Assam which the employers could utilise, but that the employers consistently failed to put their own house in order with the inevitable result that the Government, which naturally depended for its existence upon the support of vested interests, came to the assistance of the tea planters. On the one side the employers were clamouring for more labour, on the other were the employees kidnapped, seduced by the agents of the employers, and almost sold at fanciful rates since competition was keen. In 1863 legislation was passed, not to check these abuses but for merely licensing recruiters and registering emigrants, in short, to regularise recruitment.

#### **Laziness a Penal Offence.**

Two years later the screw was tightened, and the good and benign Government came to the assistance of the planters by making not only desertions on the part of the worker criminally punishable, but even laziness on his part an offence. Further power was given to the planter in his own district to arrest any worker who was alleged by him to have

"absconded" from his garden. Lest there should be any loophole in this arrangement, if any such worker was arrested for refusing to work and sentenced to a term of imprisonment, then the total duration of his imprisonment, was not counted towards the period for which he had contracted to serve his employer, which provision, no doubt, in 1870 was amended in order to enable the contract to be rescinded if an employee was sentenced to a period of 6 months' imprisonment. The period that followed 1882, when, after a commission of enquiry, an Act was again passed permitting free recruitment of labour, witnessed some of the gravest abuses that have ever been known in the history of tea plantation in India. When this new Emigration Bill was introduced it raised a storm of remonstrance on the part of the people of India and was named a "Slave Law" in disguise by Mr. Kristodas Pal. This is what he wrote at the time on 9th January 1882 in the "Hindu Patriot":-

"The Council has passed the Bill. It remains to be seen what verdict the British public will pass upon it. We have fought for the mute, the ignorant, the helpless, and we will consider ourselves amply repaid if our voice reaches the shores

**"The mute and ignorant"**

of England. Throughout this struggle we were quite aware that we were carrying on an unequal contest. On the one hand, there were arrayed the whole European community, both official and non-official, having more or less direct interest in tea, and on the other were poor coolies who were speechless and whose cause was espoused from a pure sense of duty and humanity by such weak champions as our humble selves. We may be ridiculed, abused, aye, threatened, but we will not leave the path of duty or sacrifice the cause of humanity for any earthly consideration whatever."

The agitation throughout India went unheeded until the beginning of the century when, in 1901, Act VI was passed by the Govern-

**"A storm of protest"**

ment of India providing for the closure of any area to recruiters. At this period there was found at least one man, the Chief Commissioner of Assam, Mr. Henry Cotton, who

has left an honourable mark on the administration of India, who protested against the penal provisions of the emigration law. As a result of this intervention a storm of protest arose from the lips of the planters in India, but hardly had the warning been given by Henry Cotton, than riots broke out on the tea gardens compelling the attention of the Government. So serious and menacing was the position that at last in 1906 a Committee was appointed by the Government to investigate the working of the laws under which powers were given of private arrest to the employers and penal sanctions were attached to the con-

tracts for work. In fact the changes introduced into the methods of recruitment in 1901 had the ostensible object of preventing fraud and misrepresentation in recruitment and providing adequate facilities during transport, as well as the desire to provide alleged satisfactory conditions of employment in the labour districts. But the real object was the decision of the Government that in return for the illusory protection afforded to the labourer in the shape of a so-called "minimum" wage, the actual significance of which has been made obvious from the figures quoted by me, the employer should be protected by providing criminal penalties for desertion and by giving the employer the right to arrest an absconder without warrant. This was in short, the enactment of a slave ordinance. There were of course minor supplementary provisions for medical attendance, housing, water-supply, sanitary arrangements and provision of rice at cheap rates. The actual consequences of this slave ordinance, under which

### **Right of Private arrest.**

recruited labourers on the tea plantations became virtually fixed and attached to the soil almost in the same manner in which a mediaeval peasant was attached and fixed to the soil of his great master, were, as we have seen, so terrible that the Government appointed a Committee of Enquiry which submitted its Report in 1906. Two years afterwards the Assam Government issued a notification withdrawing the right of private arrest. In the same year, the penal provisions for breach of contract were also withdrawn from four out of the eight labour districts and in 1914 from the remaining eight districts. An amending Act was passed under which the system of recruitment by contractors and uncertified garden sardars was abolished and a Labour Board for the supervision of local agents and of the recruitment, engagement and emigration to labour districts of Indians under the Act was constituted. This Act today is a useless piece of legislation. Its legality cannot stand the test of scrutiny since its application was to a particular class of labourer who was recruited under a penal agreement which he called and still calls a "girmit". As to the actual effect of the changes in practice upon the life and liberty of the coolies working in the tea plantations, it will be seen when the story of their conditions is related, that intrinsically their condition remains very much the same as it was in the olden times, except that today there is no (penal) sanction attaching to proceedings for breaches of contract.

Nevertheless in many parts the old forms of the penal contract are still utilised by employers in order to keep a hold, by misrepresentation, over the workers.

### **Present methods of recruitment**

The only method of recruitment now open to the tea plantations of Assam is by means of garden sardars working under the control of local agents. It is admitted even by the Secretary of the Indian Tea Association of Calcutta that the actual practical results of the Act were that "abuses flourished

and much improper recruiting was done principally by contractors". The position to-day is that recruiting is now entirely confined to garden sardars. The garden sardars under the Assam Labour and Emigration Act of 1901 must be persons employed on the estate for which they are recruiting. They have to be authorised by certificates granted by their employers and officially countersigned in the district of recruitment. They *have to work in their own districts* under the control of local agents who must be officially licensed, and detailed regulations are in force governing the procedure to be adopted in recruiting and forwarding labourers. The general supervision of the whole system is exercised by the Assam Labour Board, a body consisting of an official Chairman and 15 representatives of the tea industry. This Board is responsible for the supervision of recruitment "with a view to the *prevention of abuses*." Although its object is to supervise the activities of recruiting agencies in order to prevent abuses, yet it is worthy of note that out of the 16 members not a single member represents the interests of the tea garden workers. The actual recruitment is left to the Tea Districts Labour Association an organisation of the employers and an offshoot of the Central Employers Organisation, the Indian Tea Association. It is stated that the average cost of a recruit is between Rs. 150 to Rs. 200.

It might be asked ~~as to~~ why this particular restriction has been imposed upon industry and labour in Assam, whereas a similar system is not to be found existing anywhere else in India. From the historical point of view all that can be said about this system is that it was originally meant for the following purposes:—

- (1) In order to prevent most serious abuses that had arisen in the recruitment of labour for the tea gardens which could be described by no other term but that it was a system of recruiting slave labour :

**Their  
Justification**

- (2) the necessity for obtaining a sufficient number of imported workers in order to carry on the tea industry :
- (3) the desire on the part of the employers, once having recruited emigrant labour, to control the movement of the workers thus recruited ;
- (4) the actual act of recruiting workers from outside was a lucrative business, and a large number of professional recruiters had grown up who ~~are~~ willing to resort to all methods in order to help the employers in Assam to obtain *the necessary amount of labour*. Often cases were known where both men, women and young boys were kidnapped by these professional gangsters and almost sold in the market, the distance between province

being sufficiently great to act as check upon the effective prevention of such criminal methods.

It is obvious that after all allowances have been made for the good intentions of public men as well, of Government in instituting a system, under the law, of recruitment for the tea gardens of Assam, it cannot be gainsaid that the real object was to obtain the necessary amount of labour for the industrialists of Assam who, but for the assistance given them by the penal clauses of the Assam Labour and Emigration Act, would probably not have been in a position to run the industry on such lucrative lines as they have hitherto been doing. Apparently the abuses that arose out of these penal clauses of the Act were such that in 1908, as I have already mentioned, the penal contract provisions of this Act were made inoperative in four of the labour districts. It took a period of seven years thereafter for these clauses to be made inoperative in the remaining four districts. Nevertheless the employer had one more weapon in his armoury, *viz* the Workmen's Breach of Contract Act, and of Section 490 and 4921 of the Indian Penal Code. In Coorg the Penal Act ceases only this year 1931. These Acts, after a great deal of agitation, were effectively repealed in 1926, and to-day the position is that after 25 years of virtual slavery on the tea plantations, the tea garden coolie cannot now be punished criminally for leaving his employment. Side by side with this method of controlled recruitment is the method of free recruitment and from an examination of this method it is apparent that there could not have been any such grave necessity except the desire of the employer to obtain cheap labour at slave rates and keep control of the labour recruited on penal conditions for the passing of the 1901 Assam Labour and Emigration Act. It is undeniable that, during the 28 years that this system has been in force, coercion, fraud and misrepresentation have become a profitable business in the tea gardens and no agency can survive under existing conditions so long as Assam tea labour remains in an unorganised state, which ~~may~~ effectively prevent either fraud, coercion or misrepresentation from playing their part, since the necessity remains great of obtaining fresh supplies of coolies for the tea gardens of Assam from other parts of India,—unless the Government are prepared to take strong action.

The Government of Madras, in fact, are of opinion that "as so much of the Act has already been repealed, the remainder might now be withdrawn." They argue that, "with the abolition of labour contracts enforceable under the Act, there is little inducement to recruiters to recruit unwilling labour,

while from the other point of view (the improvement of communications, the spread of education and the growth of public opinion all conduce to afford the labourers protection which was lacking 25 years ago, they also point to the fact that uncontrolled recruiting for other areas where conditions are not unlike those in Assam has not led to abuses.

As a matter of fact it not difficult to see that the mentality of those who are still anxious about the question of controlled recruitment for the tea gardens of Assam is to ensure **What the Workers needed** an adequate supply of cheap labour. They are not apparently concerned with insuring that the labour that is recruited from other parts of India into Assam should obtain-

- (1) Adequate protection against the vagaries or the idiosyncracies of employers;
- (2) A minimum living wage;
- (3) Freedom of movement;
- (4) Freedom of combination;
- (5) Adequate Housing conditions;
- (6) Compulsory education; and

(7) The amenities of a civilized existence. All those things, without exaggeration, are almost everywhere in the tea plantations denied to the workers to-day. This is borne out by a historical survey of conditions in the Industry. In the year 1859, the Tea Planters' Association was formed to establish the system of emigration from Lower Bengal to Upper Assam. After shocking reports had been received by Government of the abuses in regard to irregular and illegal methods of recruiting labour in 1861 the Government of Bengal appointed a Committee to enquire into the system of emigrating coolies to Assam and emigrating coolies to Assam and Cachar. On the report of this Committee, Act III of 1863 was passed. The subsequent history of this legislation I have already detailed. But it must be noted that it is only when the Planters found that the labour supply was scarce that a mighty howl was raised for an enquiry into the matter. For instance, in the year 1896 a Commission was deputed to enquire into and to suggest means and devices

### **Official Enquiries**

for the permanent recruiting of labour for Assam. Again in the year 1906 a Labour Enquiry Committee was appointed for the tea gardens. This Committee went round the recruiting districts with the object of discovering why the Planters were not getting enough workers for their tea plant-

ations. But there is one significant sentence to be noted in the Report of this Committee which gives a complete picture (by suggestion) of the hardships suffered by the workers:

"The fact that so few people come back from Assam keeps other people from going there."

It is not difficult to imagine what the condition of the recruited labour in the tea plantations must be like when it is realised that, in several cases, it has been known that the employer on the tea plantation himself possesses magisterial powers. Should an unwilling recruited labourer desire to leave the plantation, there are a hundred ways of making him realise that he is dealing not with an employer who is powerless to prevent his freedom of movement but with an employer who happens to be also a magistrate.

#### **Employers as Magistrates**

I will now give a few cases illustrative of what is happening in Assam :

On the 20th July 1920, a woman applied to the Deputy Commissioner for discharge certificate on the ground that she had finished her period of contract. The manager was asked to report by the 9th of August, if the garden had on her any claim. On that date, the Manager filed a complaint against her for absconding and she was arrested in court. The Deputy Commissioner ordered her to return to the garden (on the ground that the agreement still exists with a balance of 27 days' work). The woman refused and was sentenced to six weeks' hard labour.

#### **A few Cases**

On the 1st of June 1928, a gang of more than 20 coolies came to complain before the Deputy Commissioner, Jorhat Sibsagar District, that they were recruited from the Nasik District of the Bombay Presidency under a contract for one year, that they had already served the garden for more than 18 months, that they were paid such a low wage that they could save nothing, that they had not even enough money on them to last them for food for one week, that they no longer desired to work in the garden and that they wanted to be sent back to their country at the cost of their employer, according to the terms explained to them before they were recruited. The Deputy Commissioner wrote to the Manager of the Estate (known as *Gabrujan*) and asked him to appear. Later, a Conference was held between the Manager and the Deputy Commissioner, which was no part of a public proceeding in the open court and the result was that the Deputy Commissioner ordered these coolies to go back to the garden to serve for another eleven months, should they require the Estate to pay for their return passage on the ground that their contract was for a period of two years. This was obviously a question of these coolies having been tricked but that fact apparently was not taken into consideration by the Deputy Commissioner. However, these coolies with their families, weak, sickly and starving, undertook

a most arduous journey back to their country, nearly 2,000 miles away. The Government Report on Immigrant Labour in Assam says regarding these coolies that they have no information as to what became of them "after a certain distance, for nothing has been reported."

A representative of the All-India Trades Union Congress was sent down to Assam with the object of organising tea plantation coolies. The necessity for this was apparent, considering that Messrs. Purcell and Hallsworth in their Report were constrained to admit that the workers in the *"virtually slave plantations of Assam are perhaps the most wretched species of humanity that are to be found in the civilized world"*. The Trades Union Congress representative discovered that the tea plantation coolies were underfed, illclothed, horribly housed, whose persons were not free from gratuitous assaults by the employers, the modesty of whose womenfolk was not safe and whose representations were seldom listened to. He found that they were represented in the local Legislative Council not by one of their chosen representatives but by a nominated member who was himself a member of the Tea Planters' Association, namely, the organization of the employers. He found that they were living in insanitary lines amidst squalor, dirt and disease, that the rate of mortality amongst them was high, and that such was the grave suspicion in the minds of the employers against men who were desirous of organizing the tea plantation coolies, that any man merely suspected of being an organizer was immediately hauled up before the courts. In this connection one case is worthy of mention.

#### **Verana's case.**

A coolie named Verana Tilanga was tried on the 15th August 1928 and sentenced to one month's rigorous imprisonment on the 31st August 1928. This coolie was going to the Cinnamara Tea Garden in search of work as he had heard that there were many other coolies in that Garden from his district. He was arrested and taken before the Manager and questioned. He replied that he had come to that Garden for work. The Manager was not satisfied thinking that he was an agitator, whereupon he proceeded to write a complaint against this coolie, which complaint was witnessed by the Manager's clerk, the peons and the Chowkidars. Thereupon this coolie was handed over to the police. The complaint was that the Manager suspected this coolie as belonging to the staff of the representative of the Trades Union Congress. The coolie was charged with causing "annoyance" to the Manager! The accused said that he had never heard the name of the Trades Union Congress or of its representative. But on the evidence of the clerk and the Chowkidar he was convicted and sentenced.

The sordid history of a coolie woman of the name of Sakhrumani who died from the effects of a brutal assault committed on **Dasarath's Case\*** her by a white planter has been public property and is by no means an isolated case. Nor is the case of one Dasarath an isolated case of assault upon a worker, who, it was alleged, died because his spleen, according to one report, "automatically gave way at the gentle touch of a European planter." The last case that I should like to mention is that of a coolie who in 1928 was brutally assaulted by a planter. The case was filed in the court of the Deputy Commissioner, the coolie having been beaten and robbed of his property and cash and driven out of the garden, whereas his wife was not allowed to leave the garden. This coolie was given shelter by the representative of the Trades Union Congress. The case was posted for the 3rd of September 1928 for trial. On the 1st of September 1928, the representative of the Trades Union Congress was kidnapped, and as the coolie was too ill to move as a result of the assault upon him, he was unable to attend the court. In his absence the case was dismissed. The next day an application for revival was made under law but was rejected.

**A Labour Enquiry without Labour Witnesses** In mentioning the Labour Enquiry Committee of 1921, it must be remembered that it was not a genuine labour enquiry into labour conditions in Assam. Until the appointment of the Royal Commission on Labour in India no genuine enquiry has ever been held into the condition of tea plantation coolies of Assam. The Chairman of this committee,

an official, later on resigned. The members consisted of five tea planters, one medical missionary and two officials. The Report mentioned that at a Meeting of the Jorhat Sub-Committee of the Assam Valley Branch of the Indian Tea Association, the Committee discussed and passed the following Resolution :

"Regarding the proposed visits to the individual gardens, the Committee is strongly of opinion that these be confined to the examination of books, lines, etc., and that no personal enquiries be made from the coolies, or the labour in any way interfered with. It was considered that any such enquiries would be misunderstood."

The guilty conscience of the planters of Assam could not have been more forcibly revealed than through this Resolution. In the Introductory Report the Committee state :—

"The Committee can trace no previous attempt to record the formal evidence of coolie witnesses. In paragraph 153 of the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee Report of 1906, it is remarked that the Committee in the course of their tour conversed with labourers.

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\* "Forward," Leading Article, 1st June 1928.

The Doars Committee of 1910 state in their Report :

“The Committee thought that no useful object would be served by  
**No formal Examination.** recording formally the statement of coolie witnesses. Any coolies brought up to give evidence before a number of strange Europeans would inevitably become frightened and confused and no information of value was likely to be obtained in that way.’ ”

After careful consideration the Committee decided, when visiting the estates, not to conduct a formal examination of witnesses.

**Exparte Verdicts** What was the result ? The result was that the Committee proceeded to make its recommendations “from the evidence of the eye as regards the condition of the labourer on the estate” and they proceeded to assert as follows :—

“His possession of cattle, carts, livestock and poultry and land under cultivation, or the absence of such property, is a more reliable indication of his material prosperity or the reverse than the recorded testimony of illiterate witnesses selected at random, or by the employer.” The Purcell-Hallsworth statement regarding the tea plantation coolies is much nearer the mark than any that has so far been made, although I am not unaware of the fact that that statement when quoted by me on the floor of the Legislative Assembly was vehemently resented by Mr. T. A. Chalmers, the representative of the Tea Planters of Assam in the Central Legislature. But his was a mere denial and the facts that have been established in regard to the wage conditions and the living conditions of the tea plantation coolies re-establish the charge that has been made in the Purcell-Hallsworth Report. In fact there have been very serious strikes in and one serious exodus by unorganized workers from the tea plantations, strikes of workers who are more or less, as I have stated, attached to the soil, who go in fear of assault and imprisonment, whose liberty is in the hands of their masters possessing magisterial powers. The story of one such exodus \* is heart-rending in the extreme. It must be noted that the tea industry during the war had been making stupendous profits ranging in some cases up to 450 %.\* With the end of the war, there came a sudden slump. The smaller plantations, having pocketed tremendous profits, thought it wise to close down altogether and dismiss the coolies, the larger ones thought they could well afford to keep the coolies on for a bit. But, although they offered the coolies not an anna more in wages when they were making their 450 per cent. profit, they wanted them now to understand they could receive no wages but only a reduced allowance. It must be clearly grasped that, even during the prosperous day, the employers kept the coolies on an allowance not sufficient to keep body and soul together.

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\* “Forward,” 1st June, 1928.

Now this allowance was reduced or abolished altogether by the Tea Planters. The "Amrita Bazar Patrika," a leading newspaper of Calcutta, said:—

"The management in not a few of the gardens have driven away the coolies, those in others have put them on such low wages and rations as to compel them to leave."

The low wages were so low that, in some cases, they amounted to no more than 3 pice (a pice roughly being the equivalent of a farthing) a day. Thousands of coolies left the plantations, men, women and children, in the year 1921. They were dying by the roadside in scores but they were determined never to return to the gardens, and to their "hellish conditions of work." They had seen enough of misery on 3 annas a day. They had seen men, women and children flogged and savagely dealt with, they had borne with untold cruelties and suffered untold privation/they would not return, they were determined.

This is what the "Amrita Bazar Patrika" wrote on the 20th of May, 1921:—

The strike of the coolies of the tea gardens of Assam is really a revolt against age-long tyranny and exploitation to which they have been the most helpless victims. From the time the coolie falls into the hands of the artful recruiter, the *arkati* as he is popularly called, till he finds his resting place in his grave away from his native home, his life is one long-drawn-out misery. And not only men but women and children have the same story to tell. Sir Henry Cotton tried his best to improve the lot of the coolies, but the planter proved too powerful for him. The moment the helpless coolie passed into the gardens it was felt that he was lost to civilization and humanity. He had fallen into conditions from which it seemed no earthly power could rescue him. The Assam coolie has thus been outside the scheme of regeneration of Christian missionaries and politicians alike. But his redemption has at last come. From whom? Not from any outside agency but from himself. He is determined to break his shackles for ever or die in the attempt."

Mahatma Gandhi, writing in "Young India" at the time, stated:—

Mahatma Gandhi's Statement  
It is admitted, it is purely a labour trouble. It is admitted that the employers reduced the wages. Both Mr. C. R. Das and Mr. Andrews report the trouble is purely economic and that the coolies have a substantial grievance. It is evident that the reformed Government has failed to cope with it. If the Assam planters are not sustained by the exploitation of Indian labour they have nothing to fear. A time is certainly coming when there will be no more unconscionable dividends. The profit of the big concerns must bear relation to the wages of the workers."

When Dr. V. H. Rutherford toured India, he said of the tea planters in his book "Modern India" as follows:—

**Dr. Rutherford's Verdict.** "On the tea plantations of Assam a man gets 8d for eight hours a day, a woman 6d and a child 3d; in the tea factories the worker earns 9d for an eight-hour working. The coolie suffers not only from this low level of wages but frequently from indebtedness to his employers in out-landish districts where he is dependent upon the shops provided by the employers for his foodstuffs, fuel, etc. This indebtedness, together with the isolation of the plantation, renders it difficult for him to seek employment elsewhere and thus practically reduces him to a life of economic slavery. His treatment often borders on the inhuman and his chances of justice and redress are chimerical."

When Messrs. A. A. Purcell, M. P., and J. Hallsworth wrote about the tea gardens, this is what they said:—

**Proudly hugging a Whip** "We witnessed a group of men, women and children working away together, while about five yards away was a planter's young assistant proudly hugging a whip. This we regarded as a good proof of 'contentment' prevailing among the tea garden plantations."

Another witness, Herr Furtwangler, a member of the International Textile Workers' Federation, who visited India in 1927, stated that:

"The wages of coolies on the Indian plantations have not changed for the last 70 years. The wages of a coolie in 1870 were five rupees per month. In 1922, the maximum wages of a coolie on the Assam tea plantations did not exceed seven rupees per month. It should be remarked in this connection that the price of rice the coolie's only article of food has more than doubled during this period. The coolie spends practically the last of his monthly wages on his rice. His clothes or rather rags worn by the Indian coolie, occupy but an insignificant position in his budget."

**Planters Take Alarm** When the movement became general, the tea planters took alarm. It had all the appearance of a general strike. Therefore at the last moment they tried to stop the exodus. Two European railway officials at Karimganj gave orders not to sell railway tickets to the coolies. The coolies said that they would walk and the march began. Later, no doubt, after the representations of Mr. J. M. Sen Gupta (later Mayor of Calcutta) tickets were sold to the coolies. But nothing daunted them. About 600 of the coolies bound for Chandpur were illegally detained at Kulaura. On the 17th May 1921 about 1,000 of them were entrained at Goalundo, but the District Magistrate of Faridpur got them down at the instance, it is said, of the higher authorities. They were kept under

police surveillance on the platform. The next morning they were driven away. The Congress volunteers fed them at a place 3 miles off and arranged to entrain them for Khoksa, but the local authorities drove them to Belgachi, where they were fed by the inhabitants. At Belgachi in due course, the District Magistrate arrived and would not allow them to enter the train, even although the gentry offered to purchase the tickets for the coolies. The next morning he relented so far as to allow them to proceed to Kusthia. Many of them died of cholera in this march. At Karimgunj Government and Police officials, acting as the representatives of the employers, offered to increase the wages of the coolies to 6 annas a day. (What an increase!) The coolies in a body refused to return, whatever the wages. Thousands poured into this town in the scorching sun, they were half-naked and ill-fed, falling by the roadside through physical exhaustion. Cholera raged amongst them. A few sensitive folk committed suicide, but yet there was not a single case of violence against constituted authority. Not a hair of a single planter was touched, not a policeman called to suppress a single act of rowdyism. The intelligentsia took charge

### **A General Strike**

after the exodus began; they tried to rescue the coolies against all the might of the planters, officials, the police and the military. In the month of May 1921, rumours were heard of the unbearable plight of the plantation coolies. There were rumours of starvation, of destitution, of serious ill-treatment manifesting itself in fancy punishments and flogging, but the world slept peacefully over these rumours which came from such a long distance. All of a sudden, Bengal awoke in the month of May to realise that thousands of coolies had left their plantations, contracts or no contracts, and were on a march to places like Chandpur *en route* for their homes in Gorakhpur, in Madras and many distant parts from which they had been beguiled on false pretences by the indentured coolie brokers. Surely to them death was better than slavery and they faced death from cholera, and from starvation, in their utter desperation. You would be inclined to call the system, which allows such horrors, murderous and you would be right. I ask

### **A Murderous System**

everyone of you who drinks his cup of tea in peace in London or in New York to think of that poor woman lying in agony by the roadside. What drove her to the exodus?

The Government and the tea planters said it was a political trick of the non-co-operators that had brought such terrible misery upon the coolies. But when the coolies were asked by the Government and the tea planter to return to the plantations, they refused. It could not clearly be the non-co-operator who had brought this about, no evidence having been adduced by any responsible person to substantiate this charge. The causes were not political—all the loud-mouthed blusterings of officials and of the capitalist press and of the hired scribes could not make it so. The causes were purely economic; in a word, starvation and ill-treatment.

I have already given the average wage-rate of 15 sub-divisions and I give below a comparative table:—

|          | 1913-14 |    |    | 1918-19 |    |    |
|----------|---------|----|----|---------|----|----|
|          | Rs.     | A. | P. | Rs.     | A. | P. |
| Men      | 6       | 1  | 3  | 6       | 5  | 9  |
| Women    | 4       | 11 | 5  | 5       | 1  | 5  |
| Children | 2       | 13 | 7  | 3       | 1  | 5  |

Now I want the reader to examine these figures, carefully remembering that rations, bonuses, allowances, etc., are all included in the average rate of Rs. 6-5-9 per month paid to non-Act coolies in 1918-19 *and that the rates had varied little in 28 years.*

I have already stated that at Goalundo railway tickets were refused to the coolies. Mr. McPherson, Agent of the Tea Planters' Association, accompanied by the proper police officials, went to the Ghats at night and disconnected the gangway preventing many coolies from leaving by steamer. Some of these coolies in the rush fell into the river and were drowned. Here is an account by Mr. Lohono of Faridpur who, hearing of the plight of the coolies at Goalundo, started from Rajbari to Goalunda, a distance of six miles. He and his comrades saw batches of emaciated coolies with infants in arms, children tied to the parents' backs, helping old men and women pass wearily, along the railway line. Farther on was a family consisting of wife, husband and four little children — the poor woman was in the last agony of cholera while her husband wrapped her in the best of the family rags and the children began to cry. At Goalundo, the District Magistrate and the Police Superintendent searched the coolies but not a rupee was found on them. They were given to understand when the search was over that the benign and just Government of Lord Ronaldshay, Governor of Bengal, was not going to pay a penny towards helping in their repatriation. Had they not better return to the gardens? No, they would not. They would leave on foot for their homes. The terrible condition of the coolies, especially of the old and of women with infants in arms and of little children, could not but draw tears from the eyes of the most hard-hearted, says one report. Not content with reducing wages and allowances to 3 pice a day, in some cases; the Managers of the tea gardens had stores opened for the coolies and made it obligatory upon them to purchase at these shops. Starvation raged amongst them and with it came cholera. One coolie, Basanta by name, gave Mr. C.F. Andrews a horrible account of torture. His hands were tied to a post in such a way that his feet could not reach the ground. He was stripped naked and whipped from top to toe until he became unconscious. Meanwhile another tragedy was being enacted at Chandpur, and I must

### The Story Continues

### Starvation

direct the readers' attention now to the benevolent help rendered by the officials in the shape of baton charges, repression and murder. In the very beginning, to ensure that little should be done to ventilate the grievances of the coolies, orders under section 144 of the Indian Penal Code were issued upon numerous workers and organisers, who had rushed from Bengal and adjacent parts to render what help they could, prohibiting them from holding meetings within seven miles of the European tea gardens. This was done by the Deputy Commissioner of Sylhet in connection with an area possessing the greatest number of tea gardens. Not content with using the law, the authorities thought that they would achieve their ends by force. At Chandpur railway station, the coolies were stranded, some unable to buy tickets, others expecting to get away. A little before midnight on the 20th May, the whole town was startled by the news that some officials, with the help of a Gurkha Company, were flogging the coolies. The townspeople made a rush for the station, but were prevented from indulging in violence by their leaders led by Mr. A. C. Dutt. The sight at the Station was heart-rending. About 3,000 coolies on this dreadful night were in the *musafarkhana* (resting house) or rather the passengers' shed. Some of them were in the Station yard. They were the left-overs from the time the authorities under the inspiration of Mr. McPherson of the Planters' Association began

to obstruct the repatriation of the coolies. The authorities  
**Repatriation:** were willing at first not to charge full rates for tickets by  
**obstructed** steamer but when Mr. McPherson arrived, this policy  
 was changed. On the 20th of May no coolies were repatriated. Something was apparently in the air. What was the intention of the authorities? The same day cholera broke out. Meanwhile there had arrived the Divisional Commissioner, the District Magistrate, the Superintendent of Police and Mr. McPherson. Fifty Gurkhas came from Dacca on the evening of the 20th of May. Armed police had been brought from Comilla on the 19th. Something was surely in the air.

The mail train left Chandpur at 8-45 p.m., the mixed train at 9-55 p.m. All would be quiet after that. The police began to clear the station of outsiders. The station master and the Traffic Superintendent called the railway officers to leave the station if not on duty and also asked the officers who were on duty to remain indoors after the departure of the trains. The newly-arrived police were guarding the approaches to the station. While the coolies were asleep and all was quiet the Gurkhas emerged even as they did at Jallianwalla Bagh. Under orders of Mr. N. C. De, the Divisional Commissioner who was present at the station-yard, the Gurkhas with fixed bayonets charged into the crowd of coolies huddled up for the night. The buttends of rifles were used unsparingly. Among the assaulted were little children and women.

### **"Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai"**

carrying new-born babies. The wounded were now lying on all sides, being pushed or kicked out of the station. Their wails were piteous. They offered no resistance but only cried "Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai." "I heard the cries of women and children," says one eye-witness. "I saw one sick coolie woman and a child entangled in the wooden bar outside the ticket-office being beaten by the Gurkhas. Many coolies lay bleeding when the townspeople arrived and heard them complain that their young ones were missing." Gopal, son of Raghu, said, "I was sleeping with my boy, soldiers roused me from my sleep. I started with my belongings on my head. The boy was following me when soldiers wounded him with a bayonet. I made over my load to another man and took the boy in my lap." Another coolie deposed that he saw the bodies of two babies, and a fat officer giving orders to the police to throw these bodies into the river. Babu Hardayal Nag, one of the local leaders, was early on the scene with Messrs. A. C. Dutt and A. M. Ghosh. Mr. Nag says that on the 19th Mr. McPherson and Mr. Sinha and others assaulted the coolies who had boarded without tickets the Goalundo and Naraingonj steamers, and that some coolies fell overboard and were drowned. Some, it was alleged, were thrown from the gangway and drowned. A letter to this effect was sent to Mr. Rope, the Joint Agent, who in reply denied the assault but said not a word regarding Messrs. McPherson and Sinha. The assault on the coolies on

### **The Land of Death**

the 20th of May was, it is said, in retaliation of an alleged assault committed by the coolies on Messrs. McPherson and Sinha on board the steamer after their deeds of violence against the coolies. What a terrible reply all this to the piteous cry of the coolies for repatriation from the land of death! Who will deny after this that those responsible for the agonising deaths of hundreds of coolies were guilty of anything less than murderous savagery?

### **The Strike Spreads**

The result of all this senseless butchery was a complete general strike in Chandpur. Even the lawyers and the cooks and the butchers joined in. There were no sweepers left to clean the bungalows of the comfortable lords of the soil whose wives were on their knees imploring for help. The strike spread quickly to adjoining towns. Iswarganj lawyers suspended practice; Nebiokona lawyers went on strike. Silohar and Khalia declared a general suspension of business. Goalundo declared a railway and steamship strike. Barisal, Sylhet, and Dacca joined in. To crown everything the Assam-Bengal Railway employees downed tools as a protest against the happenings at Chandpur and the refusal to repatriate the coolies. No doubt the steamship strike out both ways as it was essential to clear the coolies from the cholera-infected

areas. But there was no help for it. The Indian worker had after all a taste of his Jallianwalla Bagh, of unashamed butchery, of callous disregard of human life, of capitalistic relentlessness and official and secret help for the employers. To all this naturally there was a Government reply. Sir Henry Wheeler on behalf of the Government of Bengal issued a communique

### **The Government's reply**

containing the story of an alleged attempt to assault Messrs. McPherson and Sinha on the 19th; of their being hustled; a story that the coolies at Chandpur were not asleep; that they refused to move when gently asked to; that the soldiers and armed police began to beat their bedding with sticks and firewood (presumably for pure amusement) from which act they proceeded to beat the coolies (also for amusement) that a general scuffle ensued; that no severe injuries were inflicted on the coolies (I suppose they must have wounded themselves with bayonets which the soldiers kindly lent them) although it is admitted that many men, women and even children were wounded.....and so on. One final remark is made both by the Government of Assam and that of Bengal that the whole trouble arose through the misguided influence of "outsiders".....meaning of course the politicians and implying of course that the starved coolies were leading idyllic lives.

Sir Henry Wheeler's statement has been called a study in whitewash.

### **A Study in Whitewash**

It is in reality but a stupid attempt to justify a brutal episode. It would have been more in keeping with the tradition of good manners to have kept silent or at least not to have lent the authority of an official statement in clumsy denial of official crime. If it is necessary to refute Sir Henry Wheeler recourse need only be had to the report of the Divisional Commissioner's interview with Mr. A. C. Dutt. The Commissioner (the official on the spot) denied any attempt by the coolies to rush the steamers as stated by Sir Henry Wheeler; or that the coolies offered resistance; or that there were outsiders inciting them; or that there was any interval between the request to the coolies to clear out and the commencement of the assault. Asked if, knowing that the Chandpur crowd was composed more than half of women and children, he would have assaulted them had they been English women and children, Mr. Wares, the District Magistrate, interrupted to answer that the suffragettes in England were far more severely dealt with and that the assault on the coolies was made to create an impression! English women! Please take note.

Finally let me give a portion of Mr. Andrews' own statement which sums up the whole situation with the fire of brave and noble language.

Referring to what he called the Gurkha outrage the speaker said: "It

**"Made my  
Blood hot with  
Indignation"**

made my blood hot with indignation to see these pitiable derelicts of humanity, a weak sickly child, half starved women, and an infirm old man presented before me with wounds on their bodies which the brutal assault of the Gurkha soldiers had caused. I made many further enquiries during my stay in Chandpur. I began to collect evidence for the non-official investigation. All that I subsequently found out corroborated my first impression, that a wicked and inhuman act had been perpetrated, which the people of India are not likely soon to forget. If I were to describe its barest outline, it means that human beings in the last stage of misery and exhaustion, who should clearly have been objects of tenderness and compassion, were assaulted while they were lying on the railway platform late in the night by Gurkha soldiers. They offered no resistance. Yet weak women and children and feeble old men, who were too infirm to move quickly, were hit over the head and on the body with the buttends of rifles and other weapons in order to force them to get up from the ground. When I challenged the Commissioner himself, he acknowledged that he had pulled one Gurkha soldier off with his own hands because he found him beating the people roughly with his weapon. The Commissioner also told me that he had ordered the whistle finally to be blown, because he saw the violence that was being used was too great. This, at least, is an acknowledgement of the assault and a severe sign of repentance. But the Government press communique by its white-washing account and suppression of the truth reflects no credit upon its author or upon the Government whom he represents. *My indictment of the Bengal Government, in the name of humanity, is this, that they have oppressed the*

**"You have  
Oppressed the  
Poor"**

*poor.* Where pity was needed, they have employed violence; where tenderness was required they have brought down their Gurkha soldiers; where human nature itself was calling aloud for sympathy and compassion, they have forfeited the good name of a Government. And what is an added injury, when this brutal outrage has been committed, they have called in their Director of Public Information to justify it in the public through the columns of the daily press.

"There is a still more serious indictment to follow. What happened, as far as I can read the sequence of events, was this; when the first detachment of the returned labourers from Assam came down to Chandpur, the Magistrate, Mr. Sinha, acted in accordance with the dictates of his heart and conscience and sent them forward. He obtained a concession from the steamship company and, on his own responsibility, spent nearly two thousand rupees on their transportation. Up to this point, the action of Government through

its officers was human and wise. Only one mistake was made. There should have been a medical examination at Chandpur and the sick should have been detained. But after that first act of Mr. Sinha a sudden change began. The Government of Bengal, living in the planters' stronghold at Darjeeling, with planting interests on every side of them was confronted by the solid phalanx of planters' opposition. Any action to assist these labourers to leave Chandpur was represented as taking sides against the planters. Therefore, the orders were sent from Darjeeling that facilities of departure in the way of assisted passages were not to be given by Government officers. That influence of the tea planting industry was as evident as possible to me in Darjeeling itself. It appears still to be paramount to-day. What has been its fatal result? Government had declared its policy. It will provide medical comforts for the wretched tea labourers who are congested in Chandpur. It will provide food if necessary to prevent them from starving. But the one thing it will not do is this : it will not give one pice to assist these labourers to leave Chandpur. Thus the Government has flouted the advice of every official on the spot, It has taken the side of the vested interests. It has not taken the side of the poor.

“ My own demand was the most moderate possible. I did not ask Government to undertake the whole responsibility. I asked simply for a subscription of Rs. 5,000. This has been refused. Government points to the fact that it is giving medical aid and offering food. But all this is futile if it remains alone. What is needed is to get these poor miserable human beings back to their homes. They will never go back to the plantations. Wild horses could not drive them back there. They cannot remain where they are. To keep them in cholera-stricken Chandpur, healthy and unhealthy all jumbled up together, is nothing less than criminal. They must go forward, the healthy ones first and then the others when they are recovered. Everyone on the spot agrees on this point. The missionary, the official Englishmen, the non-official Englishmen all agree on this point. But the Government refused to lift one little finger to help a single labourer forward. And so the deadlock has become complete. The whole province of Bengal, on its Indian side, is shocked by this Government act. The Government whose first duty should have been to protect the poor, to defend the poor from oppression, to stand up for the rights of the poor, refused, after the issue has been made unmistakably clear, to assist these refugees to reach their destination.

## Charges of Oppression

*"The issue before the whole of India to-day, and not merely before Bengal, is simply this. The Government not only of Bengal but of India, by its actions, had come more and more to side with the vested interests, with the capitalists, with the rich, with the powerful against the poor and the oppressed. That is the terrible indictment. That is why the poor in their misery have flocked to the banner of Mahatma Gandhi who is himself the poorest of the poor and who understands his own poor people. That is why they are even beginning to refuse such help as Government itself is still willing to offer. There was no more fateful sign of the critical days in which we live than that which was told me by an eye-witness at Naihaiti. These poor Assam-returned labourers were actually starving. The steaming cooked rice was put before them. But when they heard that Government had provided it, they refused to touch it."* The question, according to Mr. Andrews, before the whole population is this: Are you on the side of Mammon or are you on the side of God?

## The Day of Judgment

*"And I would add one more word before I close. The Day of Judgment has come for the educated leaders of the people of India also. They too will have to face the same issue. 'What are these outcasts?'"* The question will be asked: *'What are these untouchables, what are these oppressed ryots, whose misery in the plains has driven them to seek refuge in Fiji and in Ceylon and in Assam?'"*

Let me now quote a few family budgets from the Report of the **Family Budgets** Assam Labour Enquiry Committee, 1921-22.

In regard to all these budgets the main point to note is that they provide in some cases, one anna worth of fish for the whole family every third day; about one anna worth of vegetables every other day; one anna worth of milk and pulse and molasses every day; and for the rest, the family lives on rice and salt. With this starvation expenditure these working-class families are found nevertheless to be irretrievably in debt.

**SOUTH SYLHET.**  
**Caste—Yaria (Hazaribagh).**

MAN, MOTHER, 2 SISTERS : FATHER—basket-maker—4 workers.

YEARLY BUDGET.

| Receipts.     |     |     |     | Expenditure. |               |     |     |     |    |
|---------------|-----|-----|-----|--------------|---------------|-----|-----|-----|----|
|               |     | Rs. | As. | P.           |               |     | Rs. | As. | P. |
| Rice          | ... | 30  | 0   | 0            | Rice          | ... | 260 | 0   | 0  |
| Wages         | ... | 286 | 0   | 0            | Salt          | ... | 8   | 2   | 0  |
| Advance       | ..  | 42  | 0   | 0            | Oil           | ... | 26  | 0   | 0  |
| Bonus         | ... | 20  | 0   | 0            | Spices        | ... | 4   | 14  | 0  |
| Baskets       | ... | 48  | 0   | 0            | Fish          | ... | 9   | 12  | 0  |
| House repairs |     | 2   | 8   | 0            | Pulses        | ... | 26  | 0   | 0  |
| Medical       | ... | 5   | 0   | 0            | Vegetables    | ... | 13  | 0   | 0  |
| Bed Bags      | ... | 0   | 12  | 0            | Milk          | ... | 22  | 12  | 0  |
| House         | ... | 8   | 0   | 0            | Gur           | ... | 26  | 0   | 0  |
|               |     |     |     |              | Kerosene      | ... | 3   | 4   | 0  |
|               |     |     |     |              | Tobacco       | ... | 8   | 2   | 0  |
|               |     |     |     |              | Liquor        | ... |     | nil |    |
|               |     |     |     |              | Interest      | ... | 12  | 0   | 0  |
|               |     |     |     |              | House repairs |     | 2   | 8   | 0  |
|               |     |     |     |              | Medical       | ... | 5   | 0   | 0  |
|               |     |     |     |              | Festivities   | ... | 10  | 0   | 0  |
|               |     |     |     |              | Clothes       | ... | 52  | 0   | 0  |
|               |     |     |     |              | Bed bags      | ... | 0   | 12  | 0  |
|               |     |     |     |              | Utensils      | ... | 2   | 0   | 0  |
|               |     |     |     |              | Blanket       | ... |     | nil |    |
| Total         | ... | 442 | 4   | 0            | Total         | ... | 492 | 2   | 0  |

This budget shows a deficit of Rs. 49-14-0 on receipts and expenditure to which has to be added the sum of Rs. 42 as advance making a total of Rs. 91-14-0 deficit for the year. There are four workers in the family and yet working year in and year out, they are unable to make both ends meet.

## SOUTH SYLHET.

### Caste—Dom (Purulla).

MAN, WIFE, SON (adult), boy (minor), 2 CHILDREN—3½ workers.

| Receipts.               |     |     |     | Expenditure. |               |     |     |    |   |
|-------------------------|-----|-----|-----|--------------|---------------|-----|-----|----|---|
|                         |     | Rs. | As. | P.           |               | Rs. | As. | P. |   |
| Wages                   | ... | 307 | 7   | 0            | Rice          | ... | 156 | 0  | 0 |
| Advance                 | ... | 32  | 0   | 0            | Salt          | ... | 9   | 12 | 0 |
| Bonus                   | ... | 12  | 0   | 0            | Oil           | ... | 26  | 0  | 0 |
| Fish caught<br>for sale | ... | 16  | 4   | 0            | Spices        | ... | 13  | 0  | 0 |
| House repairs           |     | 2   | 8   | 0            | Fish          | ... | 19  | 8  | 0 |
| Medical                 | ... | 6   | 0   | 0            | Pulse         | ... | 26  | 0  | 0 |
| Bed bags                | ... | 1   | 0   | 0            | Vegetables    | ... | 19  | 8  | 0 |
| House                   | ... | 16  | 0   | 0            | Milk          | ... | 13  | 0  | 0 |
|                         |     |     |     |              | Gur           | ... | 26  | 0  | 0 |
|                         |     |     |     |              | Kerosene      | ... | 6   | 8  | 0 |
|                         |     |     |     |              | Tobacco       | ... | 13  | 0  | 0 |
|                         |     |     |     |              | Liquor        | ... | 19  | 8  | 0 |
|                         |     |     |     |              | Interest      | ... | 42  | 0  | 0 |
|                         |     |     |     |              | House repairs |     | 2   | 8  | 0 |
|                         |     |     |     |              | Medical       | ..  | 6   | 0  | 0 |
|                         |     |     |     |              | Festivities   | ... | 21  | 0  | 0 |
|                         |     |     |     |              | Clothes       | ... | 34  | 0  | 0 |
|                         |     |     |     |              | Bed bags      | ... | 1   | 0  | 0 |
|                         |     |     |     |              | Utensils      | ... | 2   | 0  | 0 |
| <hr/>                   |     |     |     |              | <hr/>         |     |     |    |   |
| Total                   | ... | 393 | 3   | 0            | Total         | ... | 438 | 4  | 0 |
| <hr/>                   |     |     |     |              | <hr/>         |     |     |    |   |

This budget shews a deficit of Rs. 45-1-0 to which has to be added the sum of Rs. 32 received in advance. There are three adult workers and one minor, *viz.*, four workers in this family.

**SOUTH SYLHET.****Caste—Manjhi (sonthal).**

MAN, WIFE, DAUGHTER (adult) and 2 minor CHILDREN—3½, workers.

| Receipts.                  |     |     |    | Expenditure.    |     |     |    |
|----------------------------|-----|-----|----|-----------------|-----|-----|----|
|                            | Rs. | As. | P. |                 | Rs. | As. | P. |
| Wages ..                   | 216 | 2   | 0  | Rice ...        | 182 | 0   | 0  |
| Advance ...                | 32  | 0   | 0  | Salt ...        | 4   | 14  | 0  |
| Wood, fuel<br>for sale ... | 8   | 12  | 0  | Oil ...         | 4   | 14  | 0  |
| Medical ...                | 9   | 0   | 0  | Spices ...      | 3   | 14  | 0  |
|                            |     |     |    | Fish ...        | 9   | 12  | 0  |
|                            |     |     |    | Pulse ...       | 14  | 10  | 0  |
|                            |     |     |    | Vegetables      | 6   | 8   | 0  |
|                            |     |     |    | Milk ...        | 15  | 11  | 0  |
|                            |     |     |    | Gur ...         | 6   | 8   | 0  |
|                            |     |     |    | Kerosene ...    | 6   | 8   | 0  |
|                            |     |     |    | Tobacco ...     | 4   | 14  | 0  |
|                            |     |     |    | Liquor ...      | 13  | 4   | 0  |
|                            |     |     |    | House repairs   | 3   | 4   | 0  |
|                            |     |     |    | Medical ...     | 9   | 0   | 0  |
|                            |     |     |    | Festivities ... | 6   | 0   | 0  |
|                            |     |     |    | Clothes ...     | 24  | 0   | 0  |
|                            |     |     |    | Bed bags ...    | 1   | 8   | 0  |
|                            |     |     |    | Utensils ...    | 2   | 8   | 0  |
| <hr/>                      |     |     |    | <hr/>           |     |     |    |
| Total ...                  | 265 | 14  | 0  | Total ...       | 308 | 15  | 0  |
| <hr/>                      |     |     |    | <hr/>           |     |     |    |

This budget shews a deficit of Rs. 43-7-0 to which has to be added the sum of Rs. 32 received in advance. There are three adult workers and two minors, *viz.*, five workers in this family.

**SOUTH SYLHET.****Caste—Gond.****MAN, MOTHER, WIFE and 2 CHILDREN—3 workers.****YEARLY BUDGET.**

| Receipts.          |            |          |          | Expenditure.     |            |           |          |
|--------------------|------------|----------|----------|------------------|------------|-----------|----------|
|                    | Rs.        | As.      | P.       |                  | Rs.        | As.       | P.       |
| Rice ...           | 6          | 0        | 0        | Rice ...         | 156        | 0         | 0        |
| Wages ...          | 221        | 13       | 0        | Salt ...         | 6          | 8         | 0        |
| Wood, fuel         | 39         | 0        | 0        | Oil ...          | 16         | 4         | 0        |
| Milk ...           | 9          | 12       | 0        | Spices ...       | 3          | 4         | 0        |
| Vegetables         | 13         | 0        | 0        | Fish ...         | 16         | 4         | 0        |
| House repairs      | 2          | 0        | 0        | Pulse ...        | 24         | 6         | 0        |
| Medical attendance | 6          | 0        | 0        | Vegetables       | 26         | 0         | 0        |
| Blankets...        | 5          | 0        | 0        | Milk ...         | 9          | 12        | 0        |
| Bed bags...        | 1          | 0        | 0        | Gur ...          | 9          | 12        | 0        |
| Agreement          |            |          |          | Kerosene ...     | 9          | 12        | 0        |
| Advance            | 32         | 0        | 0        | Tobacco ...      | 6          | 8         | 0        |
| Bonus, monthly     | 18         | 0        | 0        | Liquor ...       | 52         | 0         | 0        |
| House ...          | 9          | 0        | 0        | Interest ...     | 29         | 4         | 0        |
|                    |            |          |          | House repairs    | 2          | 0         | 0        |
|                    |            |          |          | Medical ...      | 6          | 0         | 0        |
|                    |            |          |          | Festivities      | 2          | 0         | 0        |
|                    |            |          |          | Clothes ...      | 24         | 0         | 0        |
|                    |            |          |          | Bed bags...      | 1          | 0         | 0        |
|                    |            |          |          | Utensils ...     | 1          | 0         | 0        |
|                    |            |          |          | Blankets ...     | 5          | 0         | 0        |
| <b>Total ...</b>   | <b>362</b> | <b>9</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>Total ...</b> | <b>406</b> | <b>10</b> | <b>0</b> |

This budget shows a deficit of Rs. 44-1-0 to which has to be added the sum of Rs. 82 received in advance. There are three adult workers and two minors.

## What it costs a coolie man for a Year.

### FOODSTUFFS

|                                                              | Rs. | As. | P. |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|----|
| Rice 12 ch. a day = 6 mds. 25 srs. at Rs. 5 per md. ...      | 33  | 2   | 0* |
| Mustard oil 1½ ch. weekly = 4 srs. 14 ch. at annas 12 a seer | 3   | 10  | 0  |
| Salt 1½ ch. weekly = 4 srs. 14 ch. at annas 2 a seer ..      | 0   | 11  | 6  |
| Dal 2½ ch. weekly = 8 srs. 2 ch. at annas 4 a seer ...       | 2   | 0   | 6  |
| Spices, Haladi, Onions, etc., = 9 pies a week ...            | 2   | 7   | 0  |
| Tobacco ... ..                                               | 2   | 0   | 0  |
| <hr/>                                                        |     |     |    |
| Total ...                                                    | 43  | 15  | 0  |
| <hr/>                                                        |     |     |    |

### CLOTHES.

|              | Rs. | As. | P. |
|--------------|-----|-----|----|
| 2 Dhotis ... | 4   | 0   | 0  |
| 1 Coat ...   | 3   | 0   | 0  |
| <hr/>        |     |     |    |
|              |     | 7   | 0  |
|              |     | 0   | 0  |
| <hr/>        |     |     |    |
| Total ...    | 50  | 15  | 0  |
| <hr/>        |     |     |    |

## Earnings of a man for a year.

Rs. 7 A MONTH (only wages).

|                  | Rs. | As. | P. |
|------------------|-----|-----|----|
| Rs. 7 × 12 =     | 84  | 0   | 0  |
| Less expenditure | 50  | 15  | 0  |
| <hr/>            |     |     |    |
| *Net saving ...  | 33  | 1   | 0  |

\*Besides this the man has his *ficca* earnings.

## ITAKHULI TEA ESTATE.

## What it costs a coolie woman for a year.

## FOODSTUFFS

|                                                                            |  |  | Rs. | As. | P. |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|-----|-----|----|
| Rice 10 ch. a day = 5 mds. 30 srs. at Rs 5 per md. ...                     |  |  | 28  | 12  | 0  |
| Mustard oil $1\frac{1}{2}$ ch. weekly = 4 srs. 14 ch. at annas 12 a sr.... |  |  | 3   | 10  | 0  |
| Salt $1\frac{1}{2}$ ch. weekly = 6 srs. 14 ch. at annas 2 a sr. ...        |  |  | 0   | 11  | 6  |
| Dal $2\frac{1}{2}$ ch. weekly = 8 srs. 2 ch. at annas 4 a sr. ...          |  |  | 2   | 0   | 6  |
| Spices haldi, onions, etc. = 9 pies a week ...                             |  |  | 2   | 7   | 0  |
| Tobacco ...                                                                |  |  | 2   | 0   | 0  |
| Total ...                                                                  |  |  | 39  | 9   | 0  |

## CLOTHES.

|                 |  |  | Rs. | As. | P. |
|-----------------|--|--|-----|-----|----|
| 3 Sarees ..     |  |  | 7   | 8   | 0  |
| 2 Jackets ...   |  |  | 3   | 0   | 0  |
|                 |  |  | 10  | 8   | 0  |
| Grand Total ... |  |  | 50  | 1   | 0  |

Rs. 50-1-0+12=Rs. 4-2-9 roughly, worked for a month.

## Earnings of a woman for a year.

## Rs. 6 A MONTH (only wages)

|                  |  | Rs. | As. | P. |
|------------------|--|-----|-----|----|
| Rs. 6 × 12 =     |  | 72  | 0   | 0  |
| Less expenditure |  | 50  | 1   | 0  |
| *Net saving ...  |  | 21  | 15  | 0  |

\*Besides this a woman has got ticca earnings.

These last two budgets give a picture of a woman living practically on the margin of starvation. Her expenditure is reckoned at Rs. 50-4-0 and her income at Rs. 72 per year giving her a net saving of Rs. 21-15-0 but it must not be forgotten that no allowance is made in this case for sickness and absence in the matter of earnings, and it is difficult in all the cases that have been quoted to get a true picture of what is happening in the tea plantations, as obviously these last two budgets have no bearing on the realities of the situation in the tea gardens.

### Official Statistics

The Government of Assam have reckoned the monthly cash earnings for the year 1927-28 on the basis of the average working strength of a tea plantation at Rs. 13-2-1 for men, Rs. 11-6-11 for women and Rs. 7-0-6 for children in the Assam Valley and Rs. 10-4-7 for men, Rs. 8-6-4 for women and Rs. 5-4-0 for children in the Surma Valley. Now obviously this is an *ad hoc* method of calculation and gives no true picture of the actual wages of the workers employed on the tea plantations. Obviously the statements are incorrect according to the following table to be found in the official document, "Report on Immigrant Labour in the province of Assam for the year ending 30th June 1928." The average has been worked out for the Assam Division for the months of September and March at:—

|          | Average for 1927 |    |    | Average for 1928 |    |    |
|----------|------------------|----|----|------------------|----|----|
|          | Rs.              | a. | p. | Rs.              | a. | p. |
| Men—     | 12               | 11 | 4  | 12               | 9  | 9  |
| Women    | 11               | 0  | 6  | 10               | 14 | 7  |
| Children | 6                | 13 | 0  | 6                | 10 | 8  |

These figures again are figures supplied by the management and there is no valid check upon them. Further, they are figures for the months of September 1927 and March 1928 which are the busiest and slackest months in the tea garden. They give no true picture of the actual state of affairs. It is stated in the Labour Enquiry Committee Report of 1906 as follows:—

"In a note, Mr. Littleman Johnson, Commissioner for the Assam Valley Districts, after 11 years' service said. 'The longer I live, the less I value protection from the labourers' point of view. No amount of inspection will improve wages. Some years' experience enabled me to become, or to think I became an efficient Inspector when I had the time, but when are our officers to find time for efficient inspection? I will not say I consider inspection a mere farce. I do not go as far as that, but I do say that it does not take a clever manager to hoodwink the Inspector'."

**What is  
happening  
in Assam**

As a picture of what is happening in the gardens and continues to happen in the tea gardens, let me quote the two cases from the Report on Immigrant Labour in Assam, 1928. "There was a disturbance on Dahundara. The manager of the garden was assaulted by the coolies. They alleged that they were made to work overtime and were not fully paid. The offenders were tried under section 147, Indian penal Code, and three of them sentenced to six months' rigorous imprisonment and six to three months' rigorous imprisonment." This will teach the Assam tea plantation coolies how to object to fraudulent devices of the employers and to slave driving. The manager of Taikrong Tea Estate on the 16th of March, 1928 gave one of the Bengali servants a box on the ears for bad work. "The servant absconded." Apparently it must have been more than a box on the ear. Was the manager who assaulted his servant prosecuted as were the workers in the previous case? Not at all. The relatives of the absconder "came to make enquiries about him and not finding him went up to the manager's compound with a number of coolies and made a demonstration." They assaulted nobody. They merely demanded as to what had happened to one of their relatives knowing perfectly well how easy it is for a manager to take his revenge against a coolie and often go unscathed. What was the result? "Six of the ring-leaders were arrested and released on security as a safeguard against any further disturbances." The official report makes a significant admission by saying that the Deputy Commissioner reports that further reports have since been received of continuous unrest on this garden. If the report for Immigrant Labour 1928 is carefully scrutinized, it will be obvious that there is no peace on the tea plantations:—

"The relations between the management and labour force were generally good, but cases of collision were more numerous than in 1926-27. There were seven serious cases in which violence was used against managers of their estates, three in the district of Lakhimpur, two in Sylhet and one each in Darrang and Cachar. Although this increase is to be regretted, the number of such cases appears relatively small, when the large number of men employed in the tea gardens and their excitable nature are borne in mind. It is the restraint and good sense on both sides that generally prevail rather than the few cases of collision which deserve mention."

\* It was because of these conditions that it was stated that these tea plantation coolies were "toiling under most miserable conditions

in the tea gardens of Assam. Thousands of them are willing to go home or get away from these gardens but they have no passage money."

\* This system has created "a class of bond slave prisoners whose only occupation and pleasure in life lie in toiling day and night in the tea gardens on the most miserable pittance."

† "The Commissioner of Labour under the Assam Government wrote in his annual report *that famines have their uses in stimulating and helping recruitment for the tea plantations. Sir Edward Gait, too, has pointed out that the possession of land operates as a bar to the recruitment of labour.*"

‡ "Sir Edward Gait says that there are very few landless labourers in Assam preferring the independence and ease of their position to what I might call the slavery and serfdom."

What is the pleasure that these bonded slaves get out of their lives? Only this: watching their masters playing polo or tennis, helping them in their tea parties by pulling the fan.

Here are some Press Reports:—

## **GURKHA COOLIES\***

### **Story told in Court**

A correspondent from Jorhat writes:—

"On the 23rd instant before the Senior Magistrate, Mr. Raj Khowsa of Jorhat Court, Gurkhali appeared and made a statement that Mr. Bezborooa of Boloma Tea Estate (Jorhat) imported some 17 Gurkhas from Calcutta by misrepresentation and under false inducement that they would be given a salary of Rs. 26 p.m. and would be employed in flower and vegetable garden work only. Thus misled they signed the bond. Now, when they arrived at the tea garden they were made to hoe in the tea estate. But they refused to do the work.

"The Deputy Commissioner (Mr. Cantlie) went to the garden and made an enquiry. They are not repatriated yet. They have nothing to maintain themselves with and they are thus loitering for the last ten or twelve days. One of them died of starvation and disease."

"Thus the Gurkhali related their sad tale. Their untold miseries can better be imagined than described. They are perfect strangers in a strange

\* "Forward" 1st June 1928.

† Ibid.

‡ Ibid.

land. Jorhat is a small town with no Gurkhas. These people are so badly stranded that they are unable to find any means to maintain themselves or to go back to Calcutta." \*

### **Coolies Relate Their Story**

Yet more startling in its details is the story sent from Goa. These disclosures were made in the Goanese Press.

"The way coolies are recruited for the tea-plantations of Assam from among the Portuguese citizens of Goa is very scandalous. "Bharat", a journal from Goa, makes sensational disclosures in this matter. Unsophisticated, illiterate and unwary peasants from Verna and Cortalim in Goa have been systematically taken away with the connivance of some Goanese officials for slaving on a big daily wage of six annas in far away Assam. It is a pity that in spite of public protests against the iniquitous system of recruitment the Portuguese Government have not moved seriously in the matter and put a stop to this disgraceful exploitation of their man-power by the planters of Assam.

### **Drawn into the Net.**

"Some information about this foul trade has been obtained from a few of the unfortunate victims' families. One day in May 1926, when their people were working on the other side of the river, in Agacaim, two women solicited them to go for work at Carambolim. They went to the place and met an agent, an European, who employed these women. These peasants told their folk that the European had engaged them for work in New Bombay (Karwar) where they would get Rs. 4 a day and that they would be absent for twelve days only.

"Twelve days passed and they did not come back. Their kinsfolk went to Carambolim to see what had happened to their dear ones. The agent and his companions told them that they had gone to work in Karwar and that they would be back soon. Weeks passed and months, and still they had no news of their people. Again they went to the agent who scared them away and in sheer despair they went to a lawyer for help. He took money from these poor people and did nothing for them. Later it transpired that this agent was a high Goanese official. Further investigation showed that these innocent people were taken for work in the tea plantations and opium industry of Assam and that many labour agents were coming to Goa off and on, promising to pay Rs. 20 to Rs. 30 for each coolie secured. One of the chiefs of these recruiting organisations was an Englishman by the name of Ross."

### **Kidnapped ?**

A poor peasant aged thirty years who was till recently a victim of this infamy managed to escape from Assam and narrated his adventures thus:—

“I belong to a group of five workers taken from Navelim and after undergoing enormous privations and difficulties managed to come back alive to my dear home and people. Two years ago, at the beginning of the rainy season, after the sowing period was over a man from Sauvordem said that I would get Rs. 3 a day if I went for work in the Ghats for three months. I agreed to this proposal as it appeared a profitable one and as I thought that I could return in September for harvest.

“Together with my mother-in-law and aunt I proceeded to Dharwar where we remained for a week under the care of an Englishman getting six annas a day and doing no work. **Three meals in eight days** We knew the Sahib was waiting for more people from Goa. Only two persons came and the Englishman got angry with his broker for not securing more people and despatched five of us by train to Assam.

“The journey from Dharwar to Assam was eight days long and we had to change trains at three places where alone we had the luxury of three meals. For eight days we were each given eight annas only and so had to rest content with the bread we were able to buy for the entire journey, and thus we had a foretaste of the work that awaited us in Assam. What could we do except to quietly resign ourselves to our fate?

“When we arrived in Assam our dream of getting three rupees a day vanished and we found to our infinite regret that men were paid six annas a day each and the women five annas. Life is far dearer in Assam than in Goa. Here I was getting **Vanished Dreams** twelve annas a day and could hardly save. You can well imagine then our lot with six annas a day. This money barely sufficed for our meals. Sometimes we had additional work, pulling the *punkha* (fan) for the Sahib and were paid two annas extra for that. Of course rice is cheap there, but fish which is our dear dish here was a luxury we could ill afford. In a land of plenty we had to live a life of starvation and suffering. At first the thought of returning home after three months consoled us, but that time passed and nobody spoke of our going back.

“We fell at the Sahib’s feet and implored him to send us back as the agent at Dharwar had promised us. He replied that such a long journey was expensive and that we should work to earn that right to go home. When we repeated our request after a time, the Sahib said that we should save from **No Right to go back.** our daily wages of six and five annas to be able to go back. Then only we understood that our lot was cast in that infernal place and that we could never

go home alive. As we were "Portuguese citizens" we had not to sign any contract. Coolies from all other parts of India signed contracts.

**Pulling Punkhas** "Our daily life was dull and monotonous. We lived together with people from different places speaking different languages which we could not understand. Our only entertainment was to see the Sahibs playing polo or tennis and help them in their tea parties by pulling their *punkhas*.

"We did not hear of any Goanese in the vicinity except a woman of poor class from Nuvem who lived with a Sahib dressed in European costume. We heard that her husband had been sent away by the Englishman who had grown fond of that woman.

**The Journey back** "All workers were desperate, leading lives of abject misery and with no way out. I had been myself a whole year there and we planned to run away. One night we left the plantations to go home. With but a few provisions we made our way through jungles, crossing rivers and mountains during the night, hiding ourselves during the day to avoid the police and the planters' spies. After a few days we came to a port, where we took a ship. The ticket cost me nearly three rupees which was all that I had. The rest of the journey I did almost on foot, begging in all places for food and sometimes taking the train without any ticket. I crossed the Ghats during the rainy season and took nearly three months to reach Goa and when I reached my house my mother could not recognise me as I was almost a ghost of my former self. I have escaped from slavery but my people are still there."

And many thousands of them are there going through the same sordid wretchedness only to aid these capitalists in their profiteering.

## SLAPPED AND KICKED FOR ASKING LEAVE\*

### Coolies' charge

#### TEA GARDEN MANAGER ON TRIAL

SYLHET, JULY 29.....

The Japlong Tea Coolie Assault Case came up for hearing on July 26

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\* "Forward" 1st August 1928.

last before Rai Bahadur J. N. Das, Additional District Magistrate, Sylhet. This case was instituted by Madhu Uria, a labourer of the Japlong Tea Garden, against Mr. Yorkston, Assistant Manager, on the 23rd May last and the Additional District Magistrate, after preliminary enquiry, issued summons against Mr. Yorkston under Section 323 I.P.C.

• “Madhu coolie, examined, said that on April 23 he approached the accused for leave on the occasion of his son's marriage but the Assistant Manager refused and Naba, his eldest son, came and insisted that leave should be given. Upon this the Sahib became angry and slapped him. Madhu protested and he too met the same fate. He was tied with a rope with the help of the Tilla Babu and the Chowkidar and the Sahib kicked him on his mouth as a result of which blood oozed out and one of his teeth fell out. He then became senseless.

“Naba coolie said that, upon hearing of the assault on his father, the coolies of the garden came and reported the matter to the police. Apprehending that they might not get justice they carried Madhu in an unconscious state to Luccartalla Tea Garden *en route* to Sylhet. In Luccartalla they were detained by Mr. Woodland, the Head Manager of that Garden, who promised them help. The Deputy Commissioner of Sylhet, Mr. J. A. Dawson, and another Sahib came there and enquired into their grievances. They remained there a few days, but later on they found to their utter surprise that they were arrested by the police on a charge of rioting, etc. They were handcuffed and brought to prison at Sylhet. After they were all released on bail they lodged their complaint.

“Three other coolies and Mr. J. A. Dawson, the Deputy Commissioner, were then examined. Dr. Dawson said in his deposition that the Manager of Luccartalla Tea Estate came to him and requested him to go there as, he said, some Japlong coolies had come to that garden, and a row was apprehended.

“Mr. Dawson accordingly took Captain S. P. Dass, Assistant Surgeon, with him and went to the garden. There he saw some wounded persons but he would not be able to identify them. He examined Naba and Madhu and recorded their statements. The Doctor examined Madhu and Naba. There was one man who seemed unfit to walk.

“Captain S. P. Das and Mr. Woodland, Manager, Luccartalla, have been summoned to depose in this case. Mr. Yorkston has applied to be tried as a European British subject by a Special Jury. The case has been adjourned till the 13th August.”

## A COOLIE'S WOEFUL STORY\*

### Alleged Assault.

#### HOW THE EUROPEAN MANAGER BEAT HIM.

Jorhat, Aug. 16.

A complaint of assault has recently been made by a coolie before the Deputy Commissioner of Jorhat against the European Manager of a tea garden, near Jorhat.

It was alleged that the complainant who was a coolie in the garden could not attend to his duty due to illness and when he came to the dispensary in the garden for medicine, he was taken to the Manager's bungalow. The Manager was alleged to have ordered his Chowkidars and a Baboo to hold him fast and he went on beating him until the man became unconscious. One of his hands was badly fractured making it, it is said, useless for any further work. The coolie was examined by a doctor under the instructions of the Deputy Commissioner.

It was further alleged that the coolie was driven from the garden while his wife was detained in the lines. The complainant, it is said, was also robbed of his savings amounting to Rs. 15."

Here is a petition which speaks for itself. I give it as it is written:—  
"To

The Deputy Commissioner,  
Jorhat.

Respected Sir,

We the undersigned, coolies of Gabree Tea Estate, beg to grieve in the following for your kind consideration and due justice.

We were recruited from the Nasik District in the Bombay presidency, through the Igatpuri local agency of the Tea District Labour Association, 18 months ago.

Since we were immigrated to the above mentioned tea estate, we worked with the best of our physical strength, to satisfy our masters and and to live ourselves. After working for a period of thirteen months we desire to go back to our country. We have submitted our grievances before our garden manager, asking for repatriation. We were told that we are to serve the garden for full two years in order to expect our immigrator to repatriate us at his cost. As we do not understand laws and regulations to know whether we are right in claiming for the repatriations at our employer's cost but as we are disgusted with the life of the labourer in a tea garden to work

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\* "Forward," 18th or 19th August 1928.

any further, we pray your honour to arrange for our transportation to our district at the earliest possible date.

During our period of thirteen months' working in the said tea garden we earned barely sufficient for our living and nothing more. Our wages were very low to save anything out of it, so we have not even a few rupees each for our living here in case we are to be detained until our case is in pending.

We further beg to submit that we came walking to this place after obtaining permission from our manager to complain before the authorities. We cannot walk back to our country as we were asked to, by our Manager Sahib. Therefore we pray that this will receive your kind consideration to transport us to our country by any way you have at hand to oblige us with.

We are living in Jorhat near the Railway Station without sufficient to eat, and we beg your honour to provide us with means to live with assurances if we are to be repatriated.

As we could not expect anything in this respect from our masters we approached your honour with the best of humility and shall be grateful and ever bound to pray for the above act of kindness prayed for.

We are twentytwo in number; some of our names with our thumb impressions are given hereunder, for documentary satisfaction of your Honour.

We beg to remain,

Respected Sir,

Your ever most humble & obedient,  
Subjects."

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Pitiful? In the words of Mr. C. F. Andrews, it makes one's "blood hot with indignation."

According to the Government of Assam themselves little progress has been made in the direction of the education of the labourers or their children. In 1908 the Government introduced a scheme to encourage the education of children of tea labourers in schools. They divided the schools into three classes:—

(a) Schools maintained and controlled by Government;

(b) Schools owned and controlled by estate authorities but in return for the grants-in-aid by Government they would be open to visits and inspections by the District and Sub-Divisional Officers, who would hold examinations on the results of which the amount of the grant would depend; and

(c) Schools owned and controlled by the estate authorities receiving no grants-in-aid and open only to informal visits from the District and Sub-Divisional Officers.

In 1910 an estimate was made and it was found that there would be 46 (a) class, 86 (b) class and 230 (c) class schools. In 1916-17, there were only 13 (a) class with a total enrolment of 361; 40 (b) class with an enrolment of 1,096; and 90 (c) class with an enrolment of 1,172. Instead of progress being made in the matter of education from 1910 onwards we find that the numbers of these schools have steadily declined until in 1926-27 there were only 9 (a) class, 23 (b) class and 33 (c) class schools and the total enrolment of all three kinds of schools was only 1,798, that is to say, out of a million workers, adults and children, to be found on the tea plantations special arrangements have been made to educate less than 2,000 of them. "In no industry," according to the Government of India, "is any school maintained for adult labourers. The results can only be described as disappointing". The Assam Government puts the failure of these schools down to the fact that there is reluctance on the part of the workers to send their children to school and they significantly add, "most of the children of school-going age supplement the family earnings and the loss of this additional income necessitating perhaps a little more work on their own part condemns the scheme in the eyes of a large majority."

In 1924, the Legislative Council of Assam passed a Resolution recommending that the tea planters should be compelled to open up schools where there are 30 or more children under the age of 14. No effect was given to this Resolution. The Government of Assam admitted in its Memorandum that the managers, with a few exceptions, did not actively interest themselves in the question of education more from the fear of upsetting their labour force than from any antagonism to the principle of the scheme. "This policy may be adjusted, but so long as labour is scarce, to expect the employers to risk the loss of labour for any attempt to educate it would be foolish." Now, it is quite obvious that the real reason why no attempts have been made not merely to make administrative provision for compulsory education but also to enforce such legislation where provided, is that the Assam tea planter thrives upon the labour of small children.

aves  
of four

Sir Alexander Murray asked Mr. J. J. C. Watson,  
Manager, Gandrapara Tea Estate and Dr. M. Kermakar,  
L.M.F. the following questions:-

Q.—"At what age do they (the children) generally work?"

A.—"4, 5 or 6."

Q.—"Are they working with their mothers?"

A.—“ Yes, they are practically with their mothers.”

Q.—“ How many children have you on your books ?”

A.—“ We had 44 working children yesterday.”

One can imagine children of 4, 5 and 6 brought out into the fields to add to the family earnings. This particular gentleman, after his examination, offered us a cup of tea. He was a proud father of a beautiful blonde child of four. An English nurse had travelled six thousand miles into the heart of the tea-planting country to assist the mother in looking after his beautiful child, and there—just outside the bungalow—were 44 little children of a similar age who had been helping to provide for the passage money and remuneration of this English nurse. What a contrast! But it is a contrast which meets the eye at every corner of India.

The question that needs an answer is : why should large numbers of labourers, even though they are assisted by the employers, migrate from long distances—even of a thousand miles and more—to work in the slave plantations of Assam? First of all, it must be borne in mind that every attempt is made to picture the conditions in Assam before the agriculturists in the areas from which recruitment takes place, as ideal and eminently desirable, compared with the conditions under which they live and work in their homes. The recruiting areas are Chhota Nagpur, Sonthal Parganas, the Agency tracts of Ganjam, Vizagapatam, Orissa and the Central Provinces. From other Province, it is stated, that lower caste Hindus and a few Muhammadans are also recruited.\*

In fact the chief provinces from which labourers are recruited for the Assam gardens are Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, the Central Provinces, the United Provinces and Madras. In Bengal and the Central Provinces no areas have been closed to recruitment. In Bihar and Orissa recruitment has been prohibited only in the Khondmals sub-division of the Angul District, but in the rest of the province recruitment is permissible only in accordance with the provisions of the Act. In the United Provinces, recruitment under the Act is permitted only in 5 divisions, namely, Gorakhpur, Benares, Fyzabad, Jhansi and Allahabad (excluding the districts of Etawah and Farrukhabad). The remainder of the province is entirely closed to recruitment for Assam. The Royal Commission on Agriculture† was unable to find any justification for this prohibition and recommended its immediate withdrawal thus revealing its solicitude for the tea planter.

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\*Evidence before Royal Commission on Labour, Vol. VI, Part 1, Page 49.

†Para 508 of the Report.

In Madras the agency tracts of Ganjam, Vizagapatam and Godaveri were closed to recruitment up to the year 1915 and recruitment in accordance with the provision of the Act was allowed in six districts, namely, Kistna, Guntur, Nellore and the non-agency tracts of Ganjam, Vizagapatam, and Godaveri. The Act did not apply to the rest of the Presidency. Early in 1916 the Local Government extended the Act to the other districts and prohibited absolutely the recruitment for Assam from those districts. In 1923 however the Local Government changed its policy altogether and removed all restrictions as regards castes and areas. The result is that, since that date, the whole province has been thrown open to recruitment in accordance with the provisions of the Act. A part of the labour force for the labour districts in Assam is also recruited from the Feudatory States in Bihar and Orissa and the Central Provinces, but in some cases, (e.g., Bastar in the Central Provinces) recruitment is totally prohibited by the Chief. In this connection, it may be mentioned that the restrictions imposed by the Act are applicable to emigrants who proceed from an Indian State into a territory in British India to which the Act has been applied and depart therefrom for Assam. Recently efforts have also been made by the tea industry to obtain recruits from the Bombay Presidency. As the Act has not been extended to this Province, there are no restrictions on recruitment, but the efforts of the tea industry have so far met with little success.

It is generally known that the condition of the workers in these particular tracts is far from satisfactory. For instance among

**Original conditions unsatisfactory** the causes of emigration to Assam enumerated by the Chairman of the Assam Labour Board, are : \*

- (i) Increase of population and consequent pressure on the soil.
- (ii) Younger "members of a family going out to earn when the ancestral holding becomes insufficient to support all."
- (iii) Indebtedness, etc., etc., and
- (iv) Famine.

#### **Living on Leaves**

When a worker is actually living upon ground leaves of jungle trees mixed with a little maize, with the possibility of not knowing where the next meal is to come from, it is not difficult to induce him, with large promises of a fixed wage and of a little plot of land, all his own, to migrate to distant parts.

I think it was Mr. Bernard Shaw who offered to convert half of the East End to Christianity with a Bible in one hand and a loaf of bread in the other. But let us examine a little more carefully some of the conditions under which the prospective recruits to Assam live and work. In the Agency tracts of

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\* Evidence before the Royal Commission on Labour Vol VI. Part 1, Page 49.

Ganjam and Vizagapatam, there are three systems of slave or forced labour extant to this day.

These systems are known as :

- (i) the Khambari system,
- (ii) the Vetti system, and
- (iii) the Goti system.

**Systems of forced Labour** Under the Khambari system, a landlord makes an advance to a worker and the understanding is until that advance is paid off, the worker will slave for the landlord until either he runs away or dies. One witness stated \* that "the Khambari system is nothing but slavery."

The land owners (Zamindars) obtain the services of these slaves, and it is on record that generally nothing is paid to them for the services which they render.

†Under the Vetti system, the Government can call upon any man to do forced labour, and if any man refuses to do work for the Government under this system, as a witness stated, "he cannot very well refuse he will be forced to do it." The Headman of the village, who is a demi-official officer of the Government, in various ways, "influences" the men to do the job for which their labour has been requisitioned.

Under the Goti system, the Goti (i.e. the worker) can be employed by any inhabitant of the Agency. One witness‡ stated : "If I want a Goti, I will have to pay him an advance according to his requirements, and he and his family will then come to my house. He will be provided with a house and paid in kind for the services he would render. If he wants to leave the service, he should return the advance taken." He was asked : "Suppose you give a man Rs. 50 and there is no interest charged. How do you measure the extent of the service rendered by the man and his family, in order that it may be set off against the Rs. 50 advanced." The answer § was : "He cannot leave the service, unless he pays the Rs. 50. If he wants to leave my service, he should seek another master from whom he can get that amount; he can pay that money and go to some other master."

So that it is obvious that men, utterly desperate and living under conditions of mediæval serfdom, alone could be induced to migrate to distant

\*" Evidence before Royal Commission on Labour Vol. VII, Part II, Page 26."

†Ibid P. 4.

‡Ibid P. 27.

§Ibid P. 27.

parts, and when they do migrate, they find that they have exchanged one kind of slavery for another.

It was stated in a Memorandum \*submitted to the Royal Commission on Labour that "it is notorious that the lower classes are given no encouragement by the upper classes and opportunists find it considerably to their interest to exploit the slave mentality of the lower and the labouring classes."

Take the case of Koraput. †In 1928-29, 2,635 recruiters were sent down to this place. About half of them returned back to Assam taking with them 4,158 workers. They did successful recruiting from the point of view of the Assam tea planters, and when the position was investigated it was stated that‡ "the amount of money that they (the workers) can earn in Koraput is not even half of what they can earn in Assam; it is only one-third." That is why recruiting in Koraput has been so successful.

A word more about the three systems of slavery. According to the tenure of land in Jeypore and in other Agencies, land is held on the condition that the holder will do a certain amount of work without receiving payment. In recent times, an order has been passed that men are to be paid four annas and women two annas. Each village is called upon to supply a certain number of recruits for this labour for 10 days at a time, and they may be called out as often as necessary. When a worker has borrowed money, under the Goti system (it is usually a sum of Rs. 30), all that he gets in return for the unlimited period for which he is a bonded slave is 12 measures of rice, estimated at the value of 24 rupees, and extra donation/in the course of the year, estimated at the value of five rupees, one piece of cloth a year, estimated at the value of one rupee, and other miscellaneous articles, valued at approximately five rupees. And it is customary to make no cash payments whatsoever. "Somehow or other he (the landlord) keeps the debt going indefinitely." To a specific question put to a witness: § "Do you think that these systems have an influence in causing the people in the Agencies to go away to Assam?" the answer came: "Practically. To Assam or to the Doors."

Now, the Dom is supposed to be an excellent worker in Assam. One witness ¶ stated: "Some of these Doms are good workers. They are outcastes in the Agency. You can call them under-dogs. They are like Paharyas and they have rather

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\*Ibid P. 27.

†Ibid P. 20.

‡Ibid P. 25.

§Ibid P. 35.

¶Ibid P. 36.

bad times in some cases. They are definitely a criminal tribe and given to thieving and dacoity \*So this is the class which the employer is able to recruit for Assam The same witness stated: "But I know that sometimes they get so fed up with the things that they go away. There is a point when things become so intolerable that they cannot stick any longer. Although they are very conservative, yet seeing that the conditions in their own villages are not good enough, they think that on the whole it would be better for them to go away." When this witness †was asked whether, in his view, this was a system of forced labour, he said: "It is rather difficult to define forced labour. I think I have explained the position fully. They are bound, according to the system of land tenure, to provide labour when called upon to do so. I should have called it a system of bonded slavery, not of forced labour." And yet it is admitted by this very witness that, although there is no legal liability attaching to these systems of slavery, still, whenever they contract it, the workers ‡as a rule ".....are very honest and they recognise their liabilities. I know that, in quite a number of cases, there is no document whatever."

And it must be remembered that there is a constant cry from these tracts of shortage of labour for local purposes. Men, indeed, must be desperate, when they could take advantage of the great demand for labour to better their conditions, they nevertheless rather leave their hearths and homes for a distant, unknown country, than remain virtual slaves. And to sum up, this witness stated that the three factors which contribute to immigration are (i) economic pressure, (ii) various forms of oppression of the Goti system, and (iii) the Criminal Tribes Act.

In reckoning the wages of Assam workers, it must be made perfectly clear that no statistics are actually available, except those that can be collected from the workers themselves. The actual cash wages, in contra-distinction with the cash earnings on an average basis paid to the workers week by week are about two rupees a week. For instance, a man§ who has no land and no other work to do, except perhaps to gather fire-wood in the jungle, and is prepared to work all the working hours, with a view to saving money and buying bullocks, or paying rent, or taking up paddy land, is undoubtedly in a position to earn more money than the one who has to spend a part of his time on his own paddy

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\*Ibid P. 37.

†Ibid P. 38.

‡Ibid P. 41.

§Evidence before the Royal Commission on Labour, Vol. VI, Part II, P. 105.

land, and the averages are taken of both these classes. Further, a month of 30 days is reckoned for the purpose of dividing up the cash earnings among the total complement of workers on the books. With malaria taking its constant toll and the proportion of workers turning out for work being 76% of the women and 69% of the children \* i.e., one-fourth constantly absent, the averages given by the Official Report should be reduced by 25 per cent. This deduction would give for the year 1927-28, roughly about Rs. 8-8-0 a month, which gives the handsome figure of a little over two rupees a week for the workers in Assam for, practically, a seven-day week, which works out roughly at 3½ annas a day, and according to my estimate of eight hours' work, at less than half an anna an hour, and even, according to the most optimistic estimate of the employer of four hours' work (incredible) it is less than an anna an hour.

And now as regards the statement made in para 2 of the Memorandum of the Government of Assam submitted to the Royal Commission on Labour, that "it is doubtful if any analysis of all the budgets would enable one to come to any accurate conclusions about the standard of living. The evidence of the eye is more valuable than deductions from figures. The Government of Assam is satisfied that the garden coolie can now-a-days earn enough to keep him in health and reasonable comfort. He has sufficient food, sufficient clothes and a decent house to shelter him from the weather. This was not always the case, say, at the time of the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee in 1921-22. In the last decade the cash earnings of the coolie family have greatly increased whereas the prices of food and clothing have not increased appreciably, if at all. The coolie is now-a-days in a position to save more if he so wishes. The thrifty, ambitious coolie will lay out his savings in land and live-stock. There are also not a few who become petty money-lenders. In too many cases, increased earnings are dissipated in luxuries, such as drink, cigarettes, ornaments, torchlights and other such things."

Whoever the happy Civilian on a comfortable income of three <sup>he</sup> thousand rupees a month it was who wrote this paragraph, must have

**A false picture** written it with his tongue in his cheek. The reader can visualize the happy prospect of the coolie in the tea garden of Assam, leading a luxurious life on a handsome wage of two rupees a week, nay, of furnishing ~~an~~ an exquisite little house with silk curtains and may be Bokhara carpets; building up, in the course of a few years, a handsome bank account and in his turn becoming almost a Rothschild lending money to his indigent fellow-workers, who perhaps have not had the time to amass the wealth here portrayed.

This very document adds further : "Thus the material condition of the coolie improved. From his own material point, his happiness has proportionately increased. He is not so confined to a particular garden. He is more independent and more ready to air his grievances, real or imaginary, on the slightest provocation. But there is nothing to show that he aspires to 'better living' in the higher sense. He is as extravagant and wasteful as before." It is an excellent prospect—this of aspiring for "better living" in the higher sense. How many of these well-to-do, well-satisfied, well-housed well-clothed gentry of the official classes reck the indecency of uttering such balderdash, when a two-minute stroll from their magnificent bungalows, right in the heart of the jungle, would convince them of the utter unreality of the pictures they are painting.

But there is still hope for the Assam workers, according to this Official document. It states: "Very little real education can be expected for him (the coolie) in the next 50 years.... ..but until his ignorance disappears, it is unreasonable to expect his standard of living to rise.. .....Has the post-war working man in Britain, with his higher wages, cinemashows, joy rides and other luxuries, attained a higher standard of living?" It is open to doubt that the writer of this Memorandum has attained a higher level of high thinking. And right through this Report will be found cases, apparently collected expressly for the purpose through the managers of various Tea Companies, where the family income is shown higher than the family expenditure. Take any case—one of a family of two men and three boys.\* What do they eat? Rs. 10-10-0 worth of rice, Rs. 2-8-0 worth of pulse, Rs. 2-4-0 worth of oil, As. 6 worth of salt, As. 15 worth of vegetables, Rs. 1-4-0 worth of sugar, Rs. 2-12-0 worth of spices, etc., As. 7 for rent, As. 4 for clothing, As. 8 for fuel and lighting, Rs. 3-0-0 for household requisites, Rs. 2-0-0 for tobacco, Rs. 2-0-0 for drinks and drugs, Rs. 3-0-0 for feasts and festivals and Re. 1-0-0 for amusements, etc. Five men to live on this fare—a half penny worth of vegetables a day for the whole family and about a penny worth of rice per head per day!!

I have picked out this case casually, as a typical case of the so-called budget prepared at the instigation of the Government by the employers. The workers in Assam suffer from many indignities and humiliations. This persistent propaganda of lies against them and against their conditions of life and work is not the least of them.

Let me say a word in regard to the increase in wages mentioned in the official Memorandum quoted by me, stating that the cash earnings of the coolie family had greatly increased. The state of knowledge possessed by the leading Managers,

as to the actual wage position of the working classes in Assam is deplorable. I asked Mr. W. L. Travers, C. I. E., O., B. E., M. L. C., who is not only a representative of the Dooars Planters' Association, but also the leader of the European Community in India, if he could give me the individual earnings of his workers for the previous month. Mr. Travers promised to show us the books. "Later on," we were told that it was a bad month, and that it was not anything like a standard. I accepted the apology. We were told that the average monthly earnings for the year were Rs. 14-4-0 for a man and Rs. 10-5-0 for a woman, while in December it was Rs. 11-8-0 and Rs. 8-11-0 respectively.

The worker is paid for the first task, which is known as a Hazara and for an extra task if he does it—which is known as Ticca. The payment is generally now at a unit basis, *i. e.*, an anna for a certain amount of work done; if it is hoeing, so much hoeing for an anna, if it is pruning, so much pruning for an anna, and so on. Now it was admitted by Mr. Travers that the average number of days in the month put in by the worker is 17 out of 26 and that the average number of Hazaras is more than two per day. Now, if a worker puts in two Hazaras a day and gets four annas a Hazara, then with 17-day month—the wage could not come to more than Rs. 8-8-0 as against Rs. 14-4-0, the figure given by Mr. Travers. The actual payment per task, in my opinion, from the evidence that I have had placed before me, has not increased at all, although in some cases it has happened that the task itself has been somewhat decreased, owing to the difficulty of the work or the lie of the land. Mr. Travers was asked to let us know when this task was decreased, which would give to the worker a higher earning per unit.\* He said, it was at the end of the war some time in 1918 or 1919—"at the time of the famine and the influenza epidemic when the cost of the living went up." He could give no definite particulars regarding the exact date on which the task was decreased on the last occasion, but he admitted that it was stabilised about two or three years ago and that there had been no increase for the last two years. While he was not in a position to give details as to what the actual decrease was two years ago he could

**No increase for  
38 years.**

not equally give any details for 1918-19 "without investigation." In fact what has happened in Assam is this, that for nearly 38 years there has been no appreciable increase whatsoever in the wages of the workers, although the total sum paid out by an individual garden, month by month, to its total labour force, is shown to have increased with the increase, no doubt, of the holdings, and with more strenuous work demanded of the workers. But this statement will stand unchallenged that, for 38 years, there has been no appreciable increase in the rate of wages paid

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\*Ibid P. 320.

to the workers. The family earnings and the total average cash earnings which are the methods employed by officials as well as employers, in detailing the position of the working classes in Assam, are resorted to in order to throw dust in the eyes of the investigators as to the actual wage position of the coolies. It is the misery, generated year after year, which drove the workers in Assam to an exodus unparalleled in the labour history of any country in the world.

Mr. Withers, Manager of a Tea Company, was chosen by the Government of Assam to represent, under the new constitutional scheme, neither the managers nor the employers, but the workers of Assam in the Legislative Council. He stated in evidence before the Royal Commission on Labour that: "Trade Unions would lead to trouble and for that reason I say that we ought to keep our roads and exercise control over the people that come in. At present there is no guarantee that anybody coming in is really *bonafide* and has really the welfare of labour at heart. So many of these people are furthering their own interests and do not mind what happens to labour". \*

Now, it might have been a pertinent question to ask this gentleman, whether he and those employed in exploiting in Assam and its temporary inhabitants were doing so for the purpose of furthering their own interests; but the question that was put to him was this: "What sort of trouble do you contemplate?" He replied that the trouble he contemplated was desertion of work meaning a strike, and added "*anybody at present could cause a strike in the garden if he chose to, without wishing to organize the workers.*" He was told: "There must be something radically wrong if you are afraid that at any moment a strike might take place or the coolies might walk out, as a result of an outsider coming into the garden." †

He was asked: "Is the sight that we saw this afternoon the usual sight to be met with on the tea gardens—men with very little clothing and children practically naked?" The answer was: "Yes; you see them like that in the country, too."

He stated that "the coolies get an average wage of Rs. 9/- a month, excluding extra work. In September which is a good month the average earning of a man is Rs. 11/2/4." If six annas a day is spent on food, which is about the figure stated to us, then this means that every pie of what the worker earns, even in the most prosperous month of working, is spent necessarily on food and on nothing else. This is how "the material condition of the coolie has improved" in Assam.

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\* Evidence before Royal Commission on Labour, Vol. VI, Part II, Page 89.

† Ibid Page 95.

### The Employer's Views

Mr. Insch, M. L. C., Chairman, and Mr. T. C. Crawford, Vice-Chairman of the Indian Tea Association, Calcutta, which body is comparable with the Jute Mills Association as representing the employer, was asked : "Can you tell me what particular increase in wages there has been on the unit system since 1928, and if so how much ?" The answer was: "I have not brought any comparative figures." "Can you get them ?" he was asked, and he answered, "We could send to the different gardens, but we could only pick out a few estates. You would get a much truer account by getting the figures for yourself on your way round."

Q.—"The 1922 Enquiry Committee report says that the rate was increased in certain gardens from Rs. 6 to Rs. 7 for a man, and from Rs. 5 to Rs. 6 for a woman. Is that the average monthly rate fixed for minimum work (Hazara) at the present moment ?"

A.—"I rather expect the Commission would get that information on the gardens."

Q.—"Do you not think, as an Association representing employers who employ nearly one million workers, that it is part of your duty to keep in touch with the correct wage statistics, and the fluctuations in the wages paid year by year?"\*

In reply to this question, I was told that I was confusing the employers with the Indian Tea Association, because the Association was not an employer of labour, and that the question of wages was left to the District Sub-Committees to arrange. Mr. Insch was asked whether the District Sub-Committees were Sub-Committees of the Tea Association, and he admitted the fact. He was asked whether all that they were concerned with was the bonus rule No. 1, *viz.*, if one particular garden wishes to pay the workers in the district higher wages than are paid by other gardens, then the Indian Tea Association lays down a rule prohibiting the payment of a higher wage. When this question was put to Mr. Insch, at first he stated that the rule was inoperative, but, when pressed whether the rule was still in existence, he admitted that it was so. Pressed still further to state whether the policy was to make this rule operative in actual practice, Mr. Insch emphatically stated that it was not, but later admitted that the labour rules remained in practice, which was to "discourage the enticement of labour."

So that the position is that there is a definite rule laid down under the Indian Tea Association's constitution, which prohibits the payment of a

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\* Evidence before the Royal Commission on Labour, Vol. VI, Part II, Page 258.

† Ibid P. 259.

higher wage than that agreed upon by the employers, to any garden coolie. The result is that on the one side we have a highly organized body of the employers and managers representing those employers, and on the other a million human beings without any organization or mutual contact whatsoever. In a particular case, the workers on an estate wanted an increase in wages.\* Action was taken against their leaders under Section 107 Cr. P.C., viz. an apprehension of a likelihood of a breach of the peace. The employer is thus protected both by his organization and by the Magistracy of the Province should the worker demand an increase in wages. In the past he was protected still further under the Assam Labour and Immigration Act VI of 1901 in that the right of arrest was given to the employers who engaged their workers under Penal Contracts. Slavery—well !

Now, we shall see, as I have already hinted, that there has really been no appreciable increase in the wages paid to individual workers.

Here is the statement of Bachan tea garden coolie:—

### A Worker's Statement

" I get from about Re. 1/8 to Re. 1/14 a week. I have saved nothing. I have only been 7 months here.....I have just had enough to live on. At Suikata, the water is very bad and people do not get enough to eat. People cannot get enough to eat because they are ill very much and cannot work.....Nobody leaves our garden without getting permission."†

Here is another Badlu (Chamar), coolie. He states:—

".....I get from Re. 1/14 to Rs. 2/4 a week. There are no lazy people on our garden : they all work hard.....Nobody ever leaves our garden without getting his name taken off the register.

"... ..If I took the agreement, I should not be allowed to leave. If a man has taken a girmat (agreement) and tries to leave before it has expired the chowkidar will try and keep him back, and if the chowkidar does not, the Sahib will try and stop him."

One of the Proprietor-Managers of a Tea Garden was asked:—‡

" Does the Sardar ever get cross and hit the people ?" The answer was : " I have not heard of things like that ; but when things occur like that, and some chowkidars beat and abuse the men the matter is taken up and compensation is paid to the man who has been beaten," Now, in the garden of this very gentleman, the following interlude took place immediately after this statement had been made by him :—

§ (1) Mst Miriam Musulmani (woman coolie) :—

\* Ibid P. 258.

† Ibid P. 284-285.

‡ Ibid P. 284.

Mr. Clow : Where do you come from ?

A.—From Ballia District.

Q.—When did you come here ?

A.—A year ago.

Q.—What do you wish to complain about ?

A.—I want to get my name cut of the book so that I can go back to my own country.

Diwan Chaman Lall : Were you beaten ?

A.—Yes, by the *Babu*.

Q.—When ?

A.—A week ago.

Q.—What were you beaten with ?

A.—With a cane.

Q.—Have you any marks ?

A.—Yes, on my arm.

(The witness exhibited a bruise in the form of a double line several inches long on the lower arm, which in Col. Russell's opinion was probably not caused by a cane.)

Q.—Why were you beaten ?

A.—I was plucking old leaves at the end of the season and I had finished one block. I asked the Sardar if I could go on to another block. The Babu said I was to finish the block, turning round at the head. I wanted to go to another block.

Mr. Clow : Was your boy beaten too ?

A.—Yes.

Q.—Why ?

A.—Because he came to save me he was beaten too.

(The boy, Suleman, had what were, in Col. Russell's opinion, cane marks on the thigh and hip and corroborated this statement of his mother.

Q.—When did this happen ?

A.—Two weeks ago.

Sir Alexander Murray : Did you get any advance of money ?

A.—No.

(2) Suleman, (Musulman).\*

Mr. Clow : Is this your mother (Mst. Miriam) ?

A.—Yes.

Diwan Chaman Lall : Are you watched here ?

A.—Yes, even when we go to answer the call of nature.

Q.—Can you not leave if you wish ?

A.—No, we cannot leave.

Q.—Did you get a *girmit* advance ?

Q.—No.

(3)\* Babu J. Chakravarti, Doctor.

Mr. Clow. You are the doctor on the estate?

A.—Yes.

Sir Alexander Murray: Do you know this woman (Mst. Miriam) and her son?

A.—I have known them for six or seven months.

Q.—Did they come to you when they were injured?

A.—The boy showed two cane marks, one on the thigh and one on the hip. They could have been caused by one stroke.

Q.—Did the woman come to you and show any mark?

A.—She said I was beaten on the lower part; how can I show you?

Q.—What is this mark on her arm?

A.—I cannot say whether that is a cane mark or not, but she didn't show that to me.

Mr. Clow: Did you beat a man for eating cow's flesh?

A.—They eat rotten cow's flesh, and I warned him thrice. Then when I went to him he caught my neck and pushed me, and then I beat him.

(The man's back and back of the left arm exhibited a number of bruises which, in Col. Russell's opinion, were made by a cane.)

(4) † Ramswami, Labourer.

Mr. Clow: Where do you come from?

A.—From Waltair District.

Q.—If you wish to leave the garden, are you able to do so?

A.—The manager and the chowkidar keep us back.

Sir Alexander Murray: How do they keep you back?

A.—We are kept here by the chowkidar and sometimes beaten, and the chowkidar goes round at night with a lamp, and even opens the door to see if we are there.

Mr. Clow: How could you get away without money?

A.—I would do it by begging and would work if I could find it on the way.

Sir Alexander Murray: Why do you not go to another garden?

A.—They do not allow me to leave.

Q.—Did you get a *girmit* advance?

A.—No.

Q.—Never?

A.—Not in the three years I have been here.

\* Ibid P. 117.

† Ibid P. 118.

Mr : Clow: Have your thumb-impressions been taken ?

A. — My mark was taken when I came to the garden.

Q. — How did you come to Assam?

A. — I came to Chaprai garden near Nakhwa in Sibsagar.

Sir Alexander Murray : How long did you stay there?

A. — One year.

Q. — How did you get here?

A. — At Amgur Station a *karatti-sardar* told me that if I came and worked on this garden I would be able to save money.

Q. — Did he give you anything?

A. — No.

Q. — What is he now?

A. — He has run away.

Here is Bhano\* (a woman coolie).

Q. — How long have you been on this garden?

A. — Two weeks.

Q. — Where did you come from?

A. — Balijan Tea Estate.

Q. — Who did you come with?

A. — The *arkatti* enticed me here.

Q. — Does he work here?

A. — Yes. He is here in the garden. He brought four of us. Two have run away, and I and my husband are here.

Q. — What did the *arkatti* say to persuade you to come to this garden?

A. — He told me that if I came here I would be able to earn a lot of money and after earning that money I could go home to my own country.

Q. — Do you wish to go back to the other garden?

A. — Yes.

Q. — Do the others who came with you want to go back?

A. — They have run away. I and my husband have remained.

Q. — Do you know the name of the *arkatti*?

A. — Yes, Janumeah.

Q. — Would you and your husband go back to the other garden if you were sent by the Sahib?

A. — Yes.

Q. — Have you had your weekly wages?

A. — No.

Q. — Have you been beaten since you were here?

A. — No.

Q.—Have you any children ?

A.—I have no children with me. They are in my country.

Q.—How long have you and your husband been away from your country ?

A.—Three years.

Q.—Have you not had your children with you ?

A.—Since I have been here I have not had my children with me. They have been in my own country for the whole three years. Because I cannot go home I am very unhappy at not seeing my children.

Q.—You would wish to go home with your husband ?

A.—Yes, I would like to go home.

Q.—When you were on the other garden, from which you were enticed, did you want to go home ?

A.—Yes, even on the other garden I wanted to go home.

Q.—Did you ask to go home ?

A.—Yes, I asked to be sent back.

Q.—Would you bring your children here if you went home ?

A.—I would not bring them here, but I would go every year and see them.

Q.—Have you had any children here ?

A.—No.

\*Here's another—Chuttan (a male coolie).

This coolie stated that he worked 11 hours a day, had seen a lot of people being beaten, got 2½ annas a day, and that there was always an attendant who watched over them and saw that they did not run away. Here, in the tea garden, he says, he has been starving and sometimes went without food.†

It must be remembered that there used to be a bonus under the penal contract system of Rs. 12 a year for continuous work. The bonus came to be regarded as imposing the necessary legal restrictions of a penal contract, so that, if a man accepted the bonus, he knew that he was a bonded slave. In spite of the abolition, recently, of the penal contract system in Assam, employers took advantage of the ignorance of the workers, and still continued to force them to sign the old penal agreement and continued with the payment of the bonus, with the result that we found large numbers of coolies still under the impression that, having received the bonus, they were working under the old penal contract system. Mr. J. H. Copeland of the Cinnamara Tea Estate admitted that he still continued to give men a bonus of Rs. 12 and women a bonus of Rs. 6 at the end of 12 months, and it was not a bonus but in anticipation of work to be done, and that a thumb-impression was taken in the books as a receipt for this advance. The reason why this was given for work to be done was that it carried with it all the implications of the old

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\*Ibid P. 115-116.

†Ibid P. 116.

penal contract. Several workers refused to accept this advance, thereby considering themselves free from the implications of the penal contract. The following question put to Mr. Copeland and the answer given by him throw a considerable amount of light on the question:—

Q.—You yourself are aware that the older coolies, at any rate, think that this is part of the old agreement?

A.—Yes, most of them do.\*

†Mr. Copeland was asked:—

“The man whom we saw just now said that he got Re. 1-8-0 last week. Do you think that that is very much of a margin for a man like that?—You saw that the man spent a good deal on liquor. And a man like that does not do hard work; he probably works for two days in the week.”

“You are probably aware that the City of Manchester consumes more liquor than the Province of Assam. As far as this man’s consumption of liquor is concerned, is it not more or less in the shape of food, a sort of nourishment?—Provided it is taken in the right quantity.” And yet Mr. Copeland’s average worker should be able to save according to him about Rs. 21 to Rs. 30 a year. Let us see how his workers save this amount. One of Mr. Copeland’s workers, Khudiram, was asked‡:—“How much did you earn last week?” “Re. 1/10,” came the reply... “Do you save any money?” Answer: “No, it is hard enough to make a living and I have to buy clothes.”

Q.—Do you borrow money from anyone?

A.—I borrow from the shops, I owe between Rs. 20 to Rs. 25.

Q.—Do you get a bonus every year?

A.—Yes, Rs. 12 annually.

Q.—Do you think you are under an agreement?

A.—Yes, I think when I am taking the agreement money, I have to work a year and that it is an annual agreement. When I want to go away, I will not take the agreement money.

Q.—Does that mean that you think you cannot leave if you take the agreement money?

A. I think, I cannot leave. If I go away, the chowkidar will catch me and bring me back.

Q.—When did you last go as a Sardar?

A.—The year I came here and I got 15 people.

Q.—Are they still here?

A.—Some have run away and some are here.

Q.—Do you know where those who run away went to?

A.—No when they go away, they go by night, when everybody is asleep.

Q.—Do you ever go to the toddy shop?

\*Ibid P. 101 et seq.

†Ibid P. 102.

‡Ibid P. 108.

A.—No. I very seldom go. When I have money I go. Sometimes <sup>get</sup> a rupee's worth of rice, some of which I eat and some of which I make beer of. I only drink on Saturdays and Sundays.

Q.—Do you eat anything with the beer?

A.—If I have some parched rice, I eat that with the beer. If not, I drink the beer alone. \*

This is how Mr. Copeland's workers save money every year and earn so much that they spend a great deal on drink.

Here is Butan (Sardar). He was asked: "Can a coolie earn eight annas a day if he works all day?" and the answer was: "Some-  
**Cannot earn** day if he works all day?" and the answer was: "Some-  
**even 8 annas** times. They cannot earn eight annas a day on consecu-  
**a day regularly** tive days; they can only earn on one day."

"If a worker is strong he can earn Re. 1-12-0 or Re. 1-14-0 in a week." This was another of Mr. Copeland's workers' incharge of the labour force. Now Mr. Copeland was asked: †

Q.—"Do you agree with Mr. Withers that an outsider should not be allowed to come on a tea estate for the purpose of organising the workers into trade unions?"

A.—"I think that if anyone wants to come on my garden he should inform me first."

Q.—"You remember the case of Erena Telenga who was charged under Section 447, Indian Penal Code, for criminal trespass?"

A.—"Yes."

Q.—"He denied the charge and said that he had come there looking for work. You laid a complaint against him, with the result that he was convicted for having caused annoyance to you?"

A.—"Yes."

Q.—"Of what did the annoyance consist?"

A.—"There was a rumour that some people were trying to induce my workers to strike. To prevent that I wanted to stop any outsider coming into my garden without informing me first."

Q.—"The charge against him according to you was that he had come here for the purpose of organizing the workers into trade unions?"

A.—"I do not know what his purpose was."

Q.—"I have the judgment here. It says that the accused stated that he came here for the purpose of speaking to the workers about their *desh* *katha*, the story of their own country. He was then caught hold of by the chowkidar and *mehurer* and taken to the Police. Then six of your witnesses and the jailor were examined in that case. It was held by the Magistrate that

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\*Ibid pp. 89-99.

†Ibid P. 100.

there was no evidence on record to prove that this man was in touch with any trade union organization or was sent here by any trade union. The judgment runs: 'I find that the accused entered into the Telenga line of Cinnamara Tea Estate at 7 p. m. on 4th August 1928 with intent to cause annoyance to the garden authorities. I hold the accused guilty of criminal trespass and convict him accordingly.....As a sentence of fine will not meet the requirements of the case the accused is sentenced to suffer rigorous imprisonment for a month under Section 447, Indian Penal Code.' Do you think that you have power as it is to take such action against any outsider who comes here either with the object of speaking to your workers on the conditions of their country or of their own condition or with the object of organizing them into trade unions?"

A.—"Yes. if the man comes on my land without informing me first."

Each Tea Estate is, in reality a prison-house.

Now, a word more about the beating. The coolies of the Meleng Tea Estate were examined. One Khundan, Dome male, tea garden coolie, was asked:—

Q.—"What do you do if they (the workers) do not come (to work)?"

A.—"If a man is absent for a day or two we do nothing but if he does not come for three or four days he is beaten. They come then. The Sahib scolds me and I scold them and I only beat them if they are really bad. The Sahib beats them."

Q.—"Do the Sahibs beat themselves?"

A.—"The Sahibs do not beat them now but in the old days they did. Before the present manager came there was a lot of beating." †

I can understand this worker trying to protect his immediate boss.

He was further asked:—

Q.—"Who beat Kirodhar?"

A.—"The leading Sahib."

Q.—"When?"

A.—"About a year ago."

Q.—"Why?"

A.—"Because he was not working and was lazy."

This is what Kirodhar says about it:—

Q.—"Are you beaten?"

A.—"When the Sahib tells the sardar to do so. He says: 'Look at that man and go for him;' and then we are beaten."

Q.—"When you are lazy you are beaten?"

A.—"No, when the work is bad."

\*Ibid P. 106-107.

†Ibid P. 159.

Q.—“When the Sahib says that your work is bad, does he beat you himself or tells the sardar to do so?”

A.—“If the sardar is there he tells the sardar to do so, but if the sardar is not there he does it himself.”

Q.—“Do you want to go back to your country or to stay here?”

A.—“It is a matter of finance. If I were rich enough I should like to go to my country.”

When the Manager of this garden, Mr. R. H. S. Oliver, was examined, he was asked:—

Q.—“We got hold of a sardar and coolie on this garden and before the rest of the members of the Commission came we asked him if he beat the men with his cane; he said: ‘Oh, yes, he had to do it occasionally; otherwise how could he get the work done?’ We then picked out the nearest coolie and asked him if he beat that man. He said: ‘Yes, at times, and he called the coolie over and started examining his back to see if he could find any mark, but he could not find any.’ Later on, when several other members of the Commission came up, we recorded evidence formally; he was then apparently a little nervous and said. ‘Oh, no, he did not beat them, but it was the Sahibs who did it.’ Are we to take it that if a coolie gets lazy, or other-wise, it is not an uncommon thing for the sardar to use a little physical encouragement?”

A.—“I could not say; all I can say is this: if a coolie complains that he has been beaten and it is proved up to the hilt that he has been beaten, the sardar is no longer a sardar.”

Q.—“You used a word which I am told means forceful and the sardar himself is quite frank about; he says: ‘Yes, I have got to beat them when the work is bad.’ Can there be such a system in operation without it coming within your ken?”

A.—“He might do so, but I do not think so; we rather flatter ourselves that we are in touch with the coolies here; I do not think it does obtain.”

Q.—“On a garden of this size can this system be in operation without it coming within your ken?”

A.—“No, it could not; I mean he would certainly complain if it happened.”

Q.—“I see a good many people who are afraid to complain as well as some who are not afraid to complain. It seems to me to be impossible for such a system to be in operation without it being within your knowledge?”

A.—“Yes.”

Q.—“Then do you know of it or do you not?”

A.—“I do not know of any cases. The sardars are not authorized to do it; they have plenty of ways of twisting their tails without that.”

Q.— “ That is another phrase which might be interpreted as meaning forceful measures ?”

A.— “ No one likes hoeing on a hill ; it is hard work pulling land up a hill, and if a man has been doing bad work the sardar can say : “That is where you will hoe tomorrow.”

The Chairman: “ We collected two agreements at the Rowriah Gardens.

**Old penal forms**

It is a curious fact that the one on white paper is executed on 4th May 1929. It refers to this Rs. 12 and 313 days and requires the labourer in the absence of any reasonable cause to the contrary to perform such daily task and so on. The monthly wages are to be Rs. 8. Then there is a subsequent agreement on blue paper headed ‘Article agreement.’ That is entered into on 21st December 1929 on the same estate. That says “.....render him liable to the provisions of Act XIII of 1854.....’ and binds the coolie to perform 313 days’ work in consideration of advance of Rs. 12.” I can only say that the garden must be using old stock.”

It looks like an earlier print? I cannot interfere if it is a case of civil agreement. But if I see a reference to Act XIII, I will take action.

“The thing is, it has been intentionally left incomplete to serve a purpose ? It is rather a close point. I would not like to say more, because I will be the man who will demand a penalty for such unstamped documents. It is 10 times the stamp fee.”

“The point is that some of the old forms are being used because they do not object to the worker carrying the old impression, I think that the reply given on the garden was that they were using old stock. The following questions were put to Mr. A. J. Laine, C. I. E., I. C. S., officer on Special Duty with the Government of Assam, in regard to statistics supplied by the Manager about wages, etc.

“Diwan Chaman Lal: How are the statistics appearing in the Immigration Labour Reports dealing with wages collected ? Returns are submitted by garden managers to the Deputy Commissioners and the Deputy Commissioners submit them to the Commissioner who compiles the divisional average. Each Commissioner submits his Immigration Report annually for his division and the provincial average, for the purposes of the Government resolution, are compiled in the Secretariat.

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\*Evidence before the Royal Commission on Labour, Vol, VI, Part II, Page 188.

\*Ibid, P. 190.

"There is no check on the statement issued to you?—Speaking personally whenever I inspected a tea garden I invariably took with me the returns submitted by the tea garden for the 2 typical months of the year and checked them with reference to the garden books to satisfy myself that they had been correctly prepared and that the returns were accurate. Government have no reason to suppose that other officers do not test them in the same way."

"Take the instance of figures with regard to family earnings. How can you say from the books whether a particular woman is the wife of a particular man or not in order to have an accurate check of the family earnings?—You have always to trust the man who gathers the information on the spot."

"You take a total of the number of men, women and children employed and get the figures?—You will find it explained elsewhere in the Government memorandum as to how the family earnings are arrived at. A family is taken to consist of one man, one woman, 3/10 of a working child, 1 non-working child and 2/10 of an adult non-working dependent. It is admittedly an artificial method of arriving at what constitutes a normal family, but if you are to strike an average you must adopt some system of that kind."

"Would it not be possible for District Officers to check them every year?—No, the District Officer does not visit the gardens oftener than once in 2 years."

"Have you figures to show whether there has been any actual increase in the rate for hazira since 1922?—I could not tell you. I do not think we have any statistics on the point."

"Or with regard to the unit system?—We have had casual references from time to time as to whether the rates on a particular tea garden have increased or decreased, but we have no general figures for the province as a whole."

"If we wanted to see whether there has been an increase in the rates of wages whether under the hazira or the unit system the Government departments here in Shillong would not be in a position to give us the necessary figures?—No, we would not be in a position to check this from our present returns."\*

Under what is known as the Labour rules, as I have already stated, there **Labour Rules** is an informal agreement between the employers represented by the Indian Tea Association, fixing a maximum limit to the wages to be paid to the workers on the plantations. In actual practice, this resolves itself into a refusal to pay more than the minimum-maximum fixed. A worker who contracts to work on a particular plantation can, therefore, not proceed to any

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\* Ibid.

other plantation and demand a higher wage even if there is a scarcity of labour, which has been a recognized fact for generations in Assam, because the employers are so organized as to prevent any particular individual from offering higher wages. Occasionally, of course, relapses do occur amongst employers who, being anxious in times of need for labour, have been known to entice workers from adjoining or distant plantations. But as far as the worker is concerned, he is a confined prisoner upon a particular tea plantation and can get away only by running away from his employer, a process which is generally known in Assam as that of absconding. The Dooars Planters' Association were asked, through Mr. W. L. Travers, C. I. E., O. B. E., M. L. C., who was also the Chairman of the European Association in India, the following questions:—

“Diwan Chaman Lall: With regard to the informal agreement that you have in respect of wages, what is the effect of that on the mobility of labour?—The effect is that if there was any garden in the district that gave below the average earnings to its coolies those coolies would gradually leave that garden and go to another where there was a higher rate.”

“Per contra no garden can increase the wages, and no garden will, simply  
**Restriction** because that garden will be bound by your agreement?—  
**on Freedom** No garden can increase the rate of wages, but on the other  
**to increase** hand if a garden is short of labour, the manager will  
**wages** naturally do everything that he can to persuade his coolies  
 to work to the limit of their capability.”

“The point is, does not this informal agreement prevent free movement of workers from one garden to another if they are convinced that they will get better wages in another garden?—It is not only the earnings by any means which attract the labour from one garden to another and affects the mobility of the labour, but the conditions under which labourers live have a great influence on their stability.”

“Leaving the conditions on one side would the practical effect not be what I am suggesting? Perhaps I might strengthen my argument by referring you to what the Government of Bengal themselves say. They say: ‘the large amount of money spent on importation tended in the past to restrict forced freedom of movement in the labour market.’ Then again ‘Labour rules make it exceedingly difficult for the labourers to find employment on any garden other than that which imported them.’—That is not true of the Dooars. There is nothing to prevent any labourer going from one garden in the Dooars so far as I am aware.”

“Suppose garden A said, ‘I will give 6 annas for a hazira whereas garden B gives 4 annas.’ You enter into an agreement and say: ‘We shall not give 6 as.

but we shall stick to the present rate which prevails, namely, 4 as.' Does it or does it not, in practice, restrict the movement of the labourer from one garden to another?—I do not think so. Any alteration in the rate of wages would, I think, be very undesirable from the point of view of the labourers."

"I am not asking you whether it is desirable or not. I am asking you whether, in practice, it does not restrict the movement of labour?—I do not agree that it does." !!!

The following cases need careful attention :—

**A.** Two or three coolies of the Namdang colliery having assaulted a chowkidar were sent for by the Manager and one was given two strokes with a cane whereupon some thirty of them assaulted and chased him into a shop where he was beaten. Eight were prosecuted under Section 146, Indian Penal Code, of whom six were convicted and sentenced to six months' rigorous imprisonment.\*

**B.** Some two hundred and thirty Telenga and Uria coolies of Singri Tea Estate walked into Tezpur on the 30th May 1929 and filed a petition before the Deputy Commissioner, Darrang, which contained various complaints against the management. The Deputy Commissioner examined the leaders and it appeared to him that the cause of the trouble was the action of the manager in fining some women Re. 1 each for not planting "pulis" properly. It was also alleged that the manager struck one of the women with a cane. The women and their husbands then refused to go out to work and were joined by others. A section of the armed police was sent out as a precautionary measure. The coolies were persuaded to return to the garden without much difficulty after the Deputy Commissioner had promised to have enquiries made. They also complained about inadequate pay but this was not the real cause of the trouble. The Assistant Superintendent of Police and subsequently the Superintendent of Police made detailed enquiries and settlement was effected between them.†

**C.** In June 1929 there was a disturbance on Tarajult Tea Estate in the district of Darrang, culminating in a strike. The acting Manager, Mr. Watson, who had only been in charge two months, found fault with the work of a Muhammadan Mistri in the engine room. An exchange of abuse was followed by a scuffle, in the course of which Mr. Watson knocked the man down. The Mistri went out and raised the Uria lines, the coolies of which surrounded the factory with the intention of assaulting Mr. Watson against whom they were much incensed. The Assistant Manager, Mr. Cooper, who had been

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\*Government Reports on Immigrant Labour in the Province of Assam.

†Ibid.

sent for, managed to keep them at bay with difficulty and enabled Mr. Watson, who had meanwhile received some blows, to escape. The Superintendent of Police visited the garden next day and reported that the labour force was much annoyed with Mr. Watson and that it would not go back to work till he (Mr. Watson) left the garden. Some 50 Urias with the mistri came into Tazpur on the following day but were persuaded to return to the garden. The Deputy Commissioner reports that the strike was not due to economic grievances but that Mr. Watson appeared to be lacking in tact and discretion and to be overfond of forcible methods. The Deputy Commissioner, after full consideration, thought it inadvisable to take action against the coolies who were responsible for the disturbance at the factory.†

**D.** About 200 coolies of Messa Tea Estate went on strike on the 27th May 1929 and marched to Samaguri about 9 miles away. They were taken back to the garden and most of them resumed work. The refractory coolies were bound down to keep the peace and good behaviour for one year. Since then there has been no trouble in the garden and all the coolies were working regularly.\*

**E.** About 80 Munda coolies appeared before the Deputy Commissioner of Darrang on the 5th September 1927 and complained about the hoeing nirikh (rate). The Deputy Commissioner asked them to approach the manager in the first instance and persuaded them to return to the garden. On their return to the garden they at first said that they would not work until the task was reduced. They however turned out for work next morning and the manager then granted their request and reduced the task.\*

**F.** There was a disturbance on Dibru-Darrang garden. The Manager of the garden was assaulted by the coolies. They alleged that they were made to work overtime and were not fully paid. The offenders were tried under section 147, Indian Penal Code, and sentenced three of them to six months rigorous imprisonment and six to three months rigorous imprisonment.\*

On the 16th March 1928 the new Manager of Taikrong Tea Estate gave one of the Bungalow servants a box on the ears for bad work. The servant "absconded." His relatives came to make enquiries about him and not finding him, went up to the Manager's compound with a number of coolies and made a disturbance. Six of the ringleaders were arrested and released on security as a safeguard against any further disturbances. The Deputy Commissioner reports that further reports have since been received of continued unrest on this garden which is mainly due to the advent of the new manager who is not particularly successful in the management of labour.

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†Government Reports on Immigrant Labour in the Province of Assam.

\*Ibid

**H.** Just after the close of the year, 50 coolies of Naharahabit Tea Estate in the Sibsagar Sub-division struck work demanding a rupee a day as wages. Armed with lathis they invaded the office compound and threatened the staff with assault. After an enquiry into the matter, five coolies, the leaders of the batch, were found to be responsible and they were arrested by the Police and sent up under Section 143, Indian Penal Code. They were convicted and sentenced to pay a fine of Rs. 10 each or in default one month's rigorous imprisonment.\*

There were three trespass cases also in the district of Sibsagar instituted by managers. In all the cases the accused were fined.\*

At the close of the year 22 coolies of Gabroo Parbat Tea Estate also came to see the Deputy Commissioner of Sibsagar and complained that their agreements had expired and that the manager did not repatriate them on the ground that they had not completed their term of service for two years. Out of 22 coolies three were repatriated at the garden expense as they had completed their terms of service and the rest walked towards Goalpara on foot. But it was reported by the Superintendent of Police of Goalpara that they did not pass through Goalpara. No further information was received about them.\*

One hundred and thirty short-term coolies of the Geleky and Athkhel Tea Estates departed on the 10th April 1928. The manager did not send information in time for them to be met by a magistrate. They left the garden because a woman and a child of the party died. They demanded repatriation which was refused by the manager to all with the exception of 20 who had completed their term. These 20 coolies did not accept the free railway pass and went on foot with their comrades. They were reported to have found their way into Bengal. No further information about them is available.\*

**K.** \*On the 3rd March 1928 twenty-five Madrasi coolies arrived at Gauhati in a deplorable condition. It was found on enquiry that they had been employed on (Nagaghooli) Chota Tingari Tea Estate and had left the garden some 15 days before their arrival at Gauhati. They preferred no complaint against the management of the garden, beyond alleging that they were only paid at the rate of annas 12 a day. From conversation with the coolies the Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup gathered that they did not like the climate of Assam and wanted to return to their homes. As they were absolutely penniless and in distress, the Deputy Commissioner decided that in the interest

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\*Ibid.

of humanity the only course open to him was to repatriate them at Government expense. The coolies were repatriated through the local Agent of the Tea Districts Labour Association. The cost of repatriation was subsequently paid by the Company.

**L.** \*In the Sibsagar District one case of unlawful assembly was filed by the Manager of Joboka tea estate against seven coolies. Another case of the same category was instituted by the manager of Suffry tea estate. Both the cases ended in conviction of the accused. Mr. E. C. Smith of Barkathani tea estate instituted a case of assault against two coolies; one of them absconded and the other was sentenced to two years' rigorous imprisonment. The coolies of Mathurapur tea estate in this district created a disturbance and assaulted a chowkidar on being supplied with four dones of paddy per rupee instead of five as promised by the Manager. The General Manager settled the dispute with promise of six dones to the rupee. The coolies of Amguri, Barsilla, Deopani and Suffry tea estates of this district struck work and demanded higher wages. The ring-leaders at Amguri and Barsilla were prosecuted and directed to execute bonds of Rs. 50 each with two sureties to keep the peace for six months, in default to undergo six months' simple imprisonment. At Deopani, the dispute was ultimately settled by the General Manager. In Suffry the coolies assaulted a garden runner who was working for the manager and tried to make the bungalow servants and others stop work. The Sub-divisional Officer, Sibsagar, with the Assam Rifles went down, met the coolies and on their refusing to disperse caused them to be dispersed by force. There were numerous other strikes in many gardens of this district but without serious consequences or disturbances.

**M.** †The fourth case in the Golaghat Sub-division, which was tried at Jorhat, was instituted under Section 352, Indian Penal Code, by a mohurrir of the garden against the Manager of Socklating Tea Estate. In this case, the accused was acquitted under Section 245, Criminal Procedure Code.

The case at Jorhat was filed by an employee of Rajoi Tea Estate against the Manager under Section 352, Indian Penal Code. The accused was acquitted under Section 244, Criminal Procedure Code.

In the Darrang district a case occurred in Hatigarh Tea Estate in the Mangaldal Sub-division where the Assistant Manager, Mr. Johnston, complained against some coolies for rioting and assaulting him. Eight accused were sent up. But all were discharged except two who were convicted under Section 323, Indian Penal Code. In May the coolies on Hanchora Tea Estate went on strike but resumed work without any trouble.\*

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†Ibid, p. 4.

\*Government Reports on Immigrant Labour in the Province of Assam for the year ending 30-6-22 p. 4.

It will be seen that all cases against the managers are generally discharged, but it is a different story when it is a matter of cases instituted by the employers against the employees.

It has been the policy of the Government, since the discovery of Tea in **How grants were given** Assam, in 1826, to encourage the opening up of sparsely-populated tracts of the Province by offering land at specially favourable terms to the planters.†

On the 6th March 1838, special grant rules for Assam proper were prepared. No grant was to be made for less than 100 acres or more than 10,000 acres. One-fourth of the grant was to be held in perpetuity, revenue free. On the remaining three-fourths, no revenue was to be assessed for the first 5 years if the land was under grass; 10 years if under reeds and high grass; and 20 years if under forest. On the expiry of this term, revenue was to be assessed at As 9 per acre for the next three years, after which the rate was to be for 22 years Re. 1-2-0 per acre. At the close of this period, the 30th year in the case of grant of grass land, 36th in the case of reed lands and 45th in the case of forest lands, the three-fourths liable for assessment was to be assessed at the option of the grantee, either at the market value of one-fourth of the produce of the land, or at the average rate of revenue paid for rice lands in the district where the grant was situated. The revenue was thereafter to be adjusted in the same manner at the end of every term of 21 years.

A new set of Rules relating to lease-hold grants was issued on the 23rd October 1854. One-fourth of the grant was again revenue free in perpetuity, and the remaining three-fourths free for 15 years, and was to be assessed after this period at *three annas* per acre for 10 years and *six annas* per acre for 74 years more, after which the grant was subject to re-survey at such moderate assessment as might seem proper to the Government of the day, the proprietary right remaining with the grantee's representatives under the conditions generally applicable to the owners of the estate permanently settled.

So favourable were these terms that not very long after, i.e., in 1861, **Favourable terms** new rules were promulgated allowing holders of lease-hold grants to redeem their revenue payments at "20 years" purchase of the revenue at the time payable, that is to say, that at the handsome price of sixty annas an acre, most valuable land was sold to European planters who had had ample time to realize the enormous value of these lands to them as an investment. We are told that this permission is still in force, and that it has been largely taken advantage of. Nearly 300,000 acres have thus been redeemed and only 40,000 odd acres remain upon the original terms. After this, another policy was instituted,

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†Assam land Revenue Manual Revised Edition, 1905, page 17, et seq.

and the reader must note how each succeeding policy was adopted in order to benefit the tea-planter. This policy was in relation to the disposal of the land in fee-simple. At first Lord Canning, in 1861, issued rules disposing of valuable land to applicants who were mostly Europeans, at fixed rates, ranging from Rs. 2-8-0 to Rs. 5 per acre. The Secretary of State for India, realizing what a storm would arise as a result of these private treaties, insisted that the lot should be put up to auction. Grants were to be limited to 3,000 acres, and the upset price was to be not less than Rs. 2-8-0 per acre and in exceptional localities, it might be as high as Rs. 10 per acre. It must be remembered that this was just the time when the Government were handing over proprietary rights at the rate of 60 annas an acre. The purchase money was to be paid in small instalments.

These rules continued in force till August 1874, raising the upset price of land to Rs. 8 an acre. In 1876, the land was leased for 30 years at progressive rates, and the lease was put up for sale by auction at the price of Rs. 10 per acre.

The following statement shows the number of holdings and their area in each district under the tenure detailed above on the 31st March 1896.

|                       | Rules of 1838. |                | Rules of 1854. |                | Fee-simple. |                | Grants under Rules of 1838 and 1854 connected to fee-simple. |                | Thirty years lease of 1876 and Section I of the Settlement Rules. |                |
|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| District.             | No.            | Area in acres. | No.            | Area in acres. | No.         | Area in acres. | No.                                                          | Area in acres. | No.                                                               | Area in acres. |
| 1                     | 2              | 3              | 4              | 5              | 6           | 7              | 8                                                            | 9              | 10                                                                | 11             |
| Cachar ...            | ...            | ...            | 23             | 25,926         | 23          | 9,587          | 67                                                           | 136,207        | 8                                                                 | 2,784          |
| Sylhet ...            | ...            | ...            | 4              | 6,997          | ...         | ...            | 1                                                            | 2,340          | 127                                                               | 82,064         |
| Goolpara ...          | ...            | ...            | ...            | ...            | ...         | ...            | ...                                                          | ...            | 1                                                                 | 360            |
| Kumrap...             | 2              | 31             | 4              | 986            | 17          | 4,456          | 20                                                           | 12,527         | 20                                                                | 4,336          |
| Darrang...            | ...            | ...            | 1              | 293            | 85          | 45,313         | 15                                                           | 6,798          | 161                                                               | 50,787         |
| Nowgang ...           | ...            | ...            | 2              | 469            | 42          | 15,229         | 13                                                           | 6,120          | 85                                                                | 31,030         |
| Sibsagar...           | 16             | 5,196          | 2              | 726            | 51          | 31,107         | 111                                                          | 93,879         | 194                                                               | 57,577         |
| Lakhimpur ...         | ...            | ...            | ...            | ...            | 101         | 86,603         | 41                                                           | 30,216         | 109                                                               | 44,273         |
| Khasi and Janti Hills | ...            | ...            | ...            | ...            | ...         | ...            | ...                                                          | ...            | 2                                                                 | 100            |
| Total ...             | 18             | 5,227          | 36             | 35,397         | 319         | 192,295        | 268                                                          | 288,047        | 707                                                               | 273,311        |

When Calles, ex-President of the Mexican Republic, went some time

**A "Christian" Witness** ago, on a Presidential tour, he was hailed by his people with shouts of "Christ the King!" Gently, he rebuked his

people and said: "Christ, the Carpenter, yes, but not Christ, the King." Not long ago, a certain Miss Matheson, a member of the League of Nations, Economic Section, concluded a "two years' examination" of labour and economic conditions in India at the request of the United Christian Councils, of India. She was not a true follower of Christ, the Carpenter; may be, she was a follower of Christ, the King. Speaking at a conference of missionary societies in London, this lady denied the frequent allegations of "interested parties" to the effect that factory and working conditions in India were "awful and appalling." On the contrary, she is stated to have declared that, although there was room for improvement, in some matters in other respects conditions were better than in many places in Great Britain. She added that the Indian did not always desire more money and if given higher wages would only work less. Her opinion of the Indian worker is that on an average it requires three Indians to do the work of an English factory girl. This young lady's statement is horrifyingly false, though it is supplemented in regard to the tea gardens, by Mr. W. L. Travers, C. I. E., M. L. C., to whose evidence I have already referred. This is what Mr. Travers wrote under the caption "India's Labour problem! The Truth about the Tea Gardens."

"Our labourer not only lives and has his being upon a large estate belonging to the employer but he is conveyed and brought to that estate in the first place from his home district at no cost to himself at all. For this important side of recruiting the tea industry maintains a large and widely extended organization. There is an agent whose special job it is in every district where there is a *surplus population* to recruit those willing to work, even though it be for only a year. The system is called "Sirdaree recruiting" and "it is entirely upon a voluntary basis."

And at another place the observes:—

"But though the recruiting method in force is unpopular, the tea industry desires a measure of supervision of recruiting. To prevent enticement, it wishes to have simple, clear regulations by which it can itself supervise in co-operation and consultation with the Government concerned; for it knows full well that clean recruiting is a great asset.

"Thus our new labourer begins the tea garden's life fair and square, with no debt, unless indeed he has applied to the agent and been given money in his country either to pay a Mahajan or to leave for the benefit of his people. A labourer can, if he wills—and may do—send money to his parents almost immediately. Lakhs of rupees are sent from the tea districts to Chota Nagpur and other recruiting centres every year. The labourer and his wife (like anyone else he is not much good without her) are generally happy and contented persons, for their earnings are simple for their needs. If thrifty, they are soon able to buy jewellery and after a time enough can be saved for the purchase of land.

Many thousands have settled as ryots in Assam and in the Dooars, for they like to stay near a garden so that their children can work there. And the children literally swarm...Moreover, if he wants money for any need, such as the purchase of a cow, for a marriage or a poojah, it is advanced to him free of interest, to be recovered gradually. This is the *Mahap* system, where the Manager knows and cares for his people, attends to their well-being and tries his best to keep them happy and contented. Though it is obviously to his own advantage to do so, there is much more in it than self-interest. Living for years as he does amongst a kind and simple people, the normal British Manager or Assistant becomes very fond of them and finds himself advising and assisting in their marriages and in a thousand and one of their family affairs. There is a real affection between the labourer and the Sahib and they naturally turn to him for advice and help."

Can there be any doubt after reading what Mr. Travers has to say that the working classes in Assam are leading happy and contented lives under the parental protection of the tea planters ?

Let me give an interesting case, known as the Khoreal shooting case :—

The prosecution case was that a Sahib, an Assistant Manager, of the **The Khoreal** Khoreal Tea Garden shot Gangadhar Goala, a coolie, with a **case** revolver at 10 p.m. on the 25th of May 1920. The fact itself was not denied by the Sahib, whose case was that he did so in self-defence. The prosecution case, so far as the Sahib's presence in the coolie lines at that hour of night is concerned, was that he had made immoral proposals to Gangadhar's daughter, Hira, on the 18th of May when she was plucking leaves in the new extensions of the garden. On the same night the Sahib accompanied by a chowkidar of the bungalow came to Gangadhar's hut and renewed his proposals which were refused. About night-fall of the 25th of May the Sahib's bearer Nasim Ali asked Hira to accompany him to his master's bed. The demand was refused. Enraged at this refusal late at 10 p. m. the Sahib himself arrived at the scene armed with a revolver and called out "Hira, Hira." Hira's brother, Nepal, a boy of 8 years, came out of the hut and reported that Hira was not at home and began to shout for his father Gangadhar who had gone to a neighbour, a brother coolie's hut. To stop the boy shouting the Sahib fired three times.

As soon as Gangadhar heard his son shout he ran back to his hut, and began to shout. The Sahib fired three shots at him. The first missed him. the second hit him in the arm without causing any more injury than an abrasion and the third hit him on the right side of the chest, broke a rib and passed out at the back. At the third shot Gangadhar fell on the road, from where he was removed to his hut by some coolies. His wife and daughter witnessed the whole

incident while the Sahib went away towards the main road unruffled as though nothing had happened. The Sahib was tried but was acquitted by the unanimous verdict of the European Jury. An esteemed correspondent wrote in the "Amrita Bazar Patrika" in this connection :

"The history of the Khoreal case from its inception on the night of the 25th May 1920 right down to 2 p. m. of the 23rd June 1921 is an illustrious example of that resplendent impartiality of 'the administration of Justice in this country' in the hands of the European Jury. The result of the Khoreal case has not taken anybody by surprise though there never was a stronger case for the prosecution than this..... The result in the High Court is no other than it was in the Court of the Deputy Commissioner of Cachar. The only difference lies in the fact that the trial in the High Court has been regular, while that at Cachar was irregular. In the High Court eight out of nine jurors were Europeans, at Cachar all the five were Europeans. In the High Court the presiding judges acted impartially, at Cachar the presiding judge acted, in the words of Justices Teunon and Ghosh, 'as the accused's advocate.' But if the result is a scandalous miscarriage of justice, the fault is in the system which confers upon an European accused the special privilege of having the majority of jurors of his caste and colour, his own kith and kin."

Here is another case reported in "Amrita Bazar Patrika" dated 14th July 1921.

"Mr. & Mrs. S." we are told, "are the proprietors of a well-known tea garden in Cachar and occupy leading positions in the European society in the Surma Valley. Lord Curzon while up there was their guest and Mrs. S. was always given the seat of honour in State dinners and similar functions and if we can, without impertinence, call attention to the fact, she was looked upon as one of the handsomest ladies in Assam. Some years ago their Sahib from Calcutta was on a visit to the garden and he and Mr. & Mrs. S. were invited to breakfast with Mr. M., a planter whose estate was four miles away. Mr. S. asked the Burra Sahib and the Memsahib to go ahead saying that he would follow, which he did in half an hour's time. The party passed the whole day with their host. In the meantime an extraordinary occurrence had taken place in their garden. A cooly girl named Gunjari was produced by her father before the Civil Surgeon who happened to be near. The girl complained of having been criminally assaulted by her Burra Sahib (that is to say, Mr. S. whose wife, as stated above, was an extremely handsome lady) and the Civil Surgeon certified that in his opinion there was undoubtedly a criminal assault, and that the girl, in his opinion was not more than ten years old and the injury and hæmorrhage were so extensive that it was a miracle that the girl did not succumb to them. A telegram having been sent to the Deputy Commissioner, a criminal case was started against Mr. S. who was arrested and ultimately sent up for trial under Section 371

I. P. C. (rape). The case was tried by the then Dupty Commissioner, Mr. F. C. French, later Member, Board of Revenue. The girl repeated her story in Court and was corroborated by the Civil Surgeon and by other circumstantial evidence. Now, what was the defence? Not a denial of the facts (though the accused did not make any statement) but the suggestion was that the immature girl of ten years (according to the testimony of the parents confirmed by the Civil Surgeon in his sworn deposition) was a consenting party and evidence was produced that the girl was twelve years old. It is curious that the evidence came from the books of Mr. Creswell's garden whose name also figured in the Khoreal case. It was, therefore, confirmed that as the girl had passed the age of consent and appeared to be a consenting party, no offence was committed. The Deputy Commissioner accepted the argument and discharged the accused."

Miss Matheson's "examination" of Indian Labour conditions is, to say the least, unchristian-like but then was it not Pontius Pilate who asked: What is truth?—and would not stay for an answer?

# COTTON.

A survey of the historical facts regarding the number of hours worked by Indian workers in the Cotton Mills of India gives an astounding picture of the methods employed by owners—principally Indians—to exploit the manhood of the country for personal gain.

In a very recent reply in the House of Commons, the Secretary of State for India stated :—

“The total number of cotton mills in the Bombay Presidency in 1929 was 183. Of 172 of these the total authorised capital amounted to Rs. 34,49,81,000 (£ 25,873,575), the paid-up capital to Rs. 25,87,79,815 (£ 19,408,486) and the debentures to Rs. 2,64,00,000 (£ 1,980,000). No information is available as to the capital of the other 11 mills, which remained closed during the year.

“Up-to-date statistics are not available of the amount of capital held by British investors, but in 1924 the Government of India reported that the total capital of the mills then working in Bombay City was approximately Rs. 19,11,00,000 (£ 14,330,000) of which amount Rs. 2,23,00,000 (£ 1,747,500) was held by European shareholders. There were at that date 329 Indian and 62 European directors. I do not know what changes have taken place since 1924”.

When these Mills commenced operations in Bombay (about 1851) there was actually no limit to the number of hours worked by the mill hands. We advance to the year 1887 and we find that the Cotton Mills then were working on the single shift basis from sunrise to sunset, with a working day which extended to 13 hours and more, and it is stated that at that period, neither in the Bengal Jute Mills nor in the Bombay Cotton Mills, did the workers put in more than 9 to 10 hours a day of actual work. Then came electricity, and with its coming, the working day was advanced in the year 1902\* to over 12 hours, the longest day being 13½ hours and the shortest being 11 hours. In point of fact, with the coming of electric light, the hours changed between 12½ to 16 hours per day in Bombay and 15 to 16 hours a day in Calcutta. It will be seen that in the Textile industry, at the beginning of this century, the condition of the industrial worker was exceedingly distressful. Most of the

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\*Factory Labour Commission, 1907.

working hours were spent in the factory, his leisure giving him inadequate time for sleep and for food, considering that he had to walk a distance to get to the factory from his little hovel and from the hovel back to the factory. It is usual in India to pay a little more regard to the well-being of the peasant's cattle, but it seems to have been unusual for the mill-owners of Bombay to pay the least regard to the well-being of their employees.

The first Indian Factory Act was passed in 1881, amended in 1891 and replaced by a new Act in 1911, which Act was amended in 1922, 1923 and 1926. The first Act limited the hours of work for children to 9 a day; the second Act limited the hours of work for women to 11 a day and children to 7 a day; and the fourth Act limited the hours of work for both men and women to 11 a day and 60 a week.

It is on record that many children were kept prisoners in the Cotton factories under the pretext of imparting to them the benefits of education, and since it was not possible for accommodating Factory Inspectors to exercise constant supervision, the only "education" imparted to the children was that of being sweated for a paltry sum of two, three or four annas a day, whenever there was a need of spare hands. One writer\* makes the following remark:—

"The economic conditions in India make the problem of child labour quite different from that in Western countries. Indian children are under-nourished and have no opportunity to receive even elementary education. Their work, therefore, does not interfere with their intellectual condition. Since work has an educative (note the cloven hoof) as well as an economic value, factory work means to them the lesser evil. Since children work in conjunction with men and women, their hours of labour should be such as would enable them to be easily adapted to the work of men and women. One of the best methods of adapting their working hours to the factory routine is to allow them half-time labour. With the adoption of the 60 hours a week for men, their hours should be reduced to 30 hours a week."

Imagine the condition of an under-nourished child engaged in doing arduous and tedious work, appreciating the "educative" value of removing bobbins from the spinning frame! I doubt very much if the writer who made this remark would prefer sending his *well-nourished* child to a Bombay Textile Factory as a half-timer, instead of to a public school, on the ground that "education" is the lesser of the two evils and that sweated labour has an "educative" value.

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\*Dass. "Factory Legislation in India".

Mr. Burnett Hurst, who has made an interesting study of labour and housing in Bombay, states :—

“Further, the law was frequently evaded by children working in a factory from 6 a. m. to 12 noon, and then going to a neighbouring one where they would work in the afternoon, as they would be enrolled under different names. Such mal-practices were difficult to check”.

So much for the “educative” value of creating a body of half-timers.

It is recorded that whenever a Factory Inspector entered a Mill, the children were ordered to leave their work and run about the place screaming, for, if they had been chased by the Inspector, they would have run into the machinery.\*

Such is the morality of the mill-owning class. Another aspect of this morality is to be found in the fact that in 1921 nearly half the children presented by the jobbers for fresh certificates which obtained employment for them, were found to be previously certified. At that time, the wages enquiry discovered that the children were paid four to eight annas per day.

Now, one of the effects of this “educative” value of labour in the Textile factories in India is this that the average weight of a spinner, in every province, without exception, is lower by 75 to 10·03 lbs. than the average weight of a prisoner, and yet the Commission appointed to enquire into the conditions of Factory Labour in 1907 reported, in its ostentatiously perjured manner, to the effect that “no physical deterioration is observable anywhere among operatives actually at work”. I append the actual table of statistics :—

| Province.              | Average weight of spinners. | Average weight of prisoners. | Difference. |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-------------|
| Bombay ...             | 102·09                      | 112·12                       | 10·03       |
| United Provinces ...   | 107·01                      | 115·08                       | 8·07        |
| Bengal ...             | 107·93                      | 115·05                       | 7·12        |
| Punjab ...             | 113·08                      | 115·05                       | 1·97        |
| Madras ...             | 113·63                      | 114·38                       | 0·75        |
| C. P. & Berar ...      | 100·92                      | 110·45                       | 9·53        |
| Eastern Bengal & Assam | 108·00                      | 110·84                       | 2·84        |
| Burma ...              | 107·17                      | 115·7                        | 8·56        |

\*Factory Labour Commission, 1907.

I have made a reference to this question of the employment of women and children in dealing with the Indian Cotton Mills for this reason that the question of factory legislation in India was first raised in connection with the hours of work, in the Mills, of women and children. Major Moore, Inspector-in-Chief of the Bombay Cotton Department, published a report on the administration of his Department for 1872-73 in which he mentioned this question.\* He gave the number of mill hands at 8,345 and he said :—

“The hours of these mills are at present not limited by any Government regulation. The working hour is undoubtedly long, the work is fatiguing, and women and children are largely employed, and I believe as a rule there is no periodically recurring day of rest such as the Sunday of the Europeans.”

Mr. J. A. Ballard, Mintmaster of Bombay, stated that at that time in Bombay there were 2,800 women and 2,500 children under twelve in the mills. This is what he says :—

“They have to work from daylight to dark and the machinery is usually kept running the whole seven days for two weeks in the month. The temperature of the rooms is always high and the long confinement, even with light work, must be very irksome and injurious to young children.”†

The Marquess of Salisbury, the then Secretary of State for India, took note of this state of affairs and made representations to the Bombay Government, saying that he had been informed that children were made to work at the age of six and had frequently to walk a distance of two or three miles to the Factory, working from sunrise to sunset with only half an hour's interval, including most Sundays and that they “not uncommonly drop down from exhaustion between the alleys and passages of the machines.”

Miss Carpenter, who had visited India and seen the horrible conditions in Bombay, set going an Association known as the National Indian Association which made representations to the India Office and the British Government, stating the terrible evils which existed in Bombay factories, *e. g.*, terrible exhaustion, dust, 16 or 17 hours a day of unrelenting labour and a temperature varying from 90 to 100 degrees. To Miss Carpenter's efforts is due the appointment of a Commission by the Government of Bombay in March 1875 to enquire into the “existing condition and system of work in the Bombay factories and generally for improving the condition of the work people employed.” The Commission did not agree in their conclusions and the report was signed only by the President and one member. They stated :—

“The hours of work were from sunrise to sunset with half an hour

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\*Bulletin of Indian Industries and Labour No. 37.

†Ibid.

for rest in the middle of the day. The children, the youngest of whom were generally about 8 years of age, remained in on the premises all the time working and resting."

Recommendations were made for the limiting of the hours of work for adults to 12 hours a day, including one hour's rest, weekly holiday, prohibition of children under 10 from working in the factories and an 8-hour day for children between 8 and 18. The other members opposed any legislation. In Bengal, the stronghold of the European jute merchants, there was a great outcry. The Governor of the Province discovered, as a result of his enquiries, that even children of five and six years of age were employed in rope factories, that 9 to 10 hours of actual work was normal and that in certain jute mills children were kept at work for 12 hours with only half an hour's interval. And to all this, all that the local Government had to say was :

"The hours of work look long, but this has not been the subject of complaint among the labourers themselves."\*

In Bombay, in spite of complaints having been received from the Collectors of Broach and Surat advising legislation, the Government followed the line of least resistance, and stated :—

"It must be borne in mind that no complaints have been made to Government of oppression on the part of millowners either by or on behalf of the operatives."

This was in 1876. Two years later the Bombay Government changed their view and a bill was brought in by a private member, Mr. Bengalee, restricting the working of factories between 6 a. m. and 6 p. m. providing only a six-day week and limiting the hours of work for adults to 11, for women to 10 and for young persons, *i. e.*, children between 8 and 14 to 9. An hour's interval was to be provided, and the employment of children under 8 was to be prohibited. Various other provisions relating to ventilation, etc., were included in the bill. Meanwhile, the Government of India had drafted a bill which was ready in 1877. The draft bill was circulated in 1878, which aroused great hostility, the most amazing ground being solicitude for the welfare of children, whom the Government proposed to exclude, *i. e.*, children under 7 up to 1879 and children under 8 thereafter. However, the Employers' Association said :—

"The Legislature, we beg to repeat, can do them no good by turning them out and virtually leaving them to steal or beg or starve. There are not wanting orphans even who have hitherto found a welcome abode in factories and have no homes where to return on their removal from them."

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\*Ibid.

And here is another statement from a similar source.—

“Nothing could be more pleasing than the sight of little children generally full of health and good spirits working at the spindles.”

The Bombay Millowners protested against this bill, except one Mr. Hector. They said :—

“The Association deeply regrets that the bill, even in its present restricted form, should have been introduced, for it considers that legislative interference of any kind is wholly unnecessary and will be most injurious not only to the manufacturing interests of the country but to the country generally.”

Meanwhile, the first Indian labour leader had arisen, one Rughaba Sūccaram. He harangued the men. He got them together at a meeting. He was one of them. He had seen the misery that was rampant in the cotton factories of Bombay and 578 of his colleagues signed a memorial with him, giving a frightful description of the conditions in Bombay, and asking for a shortening of the working day from 14 hours “as at present” to 9 hours a day, with an intermission of at least an hour for meal, rest, etc., and a day of rest. Later, another memorial was prepared by Balaji Ramchandra Facked, before the passing of the first Indian Factories’ Act.

Another Commission appointed in 1884 by the Bombay Government stated that the work was carried on mainly by women, that it was “a sad tale of great want on the one side and cruel cupidity on the other”, and that “women were employed for long periods of 13 hours a day, two or three hours being the longest time for which they could be absent.” These workers were kept at work continuously till they were exhausted, and they were said to die frequently as a result of over-work and were replaced by fresh women if they could be found. In the busiest season, the hands worked for several days and nights without stopping. There was no other work available. And the wages paid were three or four annas for a day of 16 hours with, at times, half an anna an hour as bonus for longer hours.

The origin of holding public meetings of workers dates back to the month of September 1884, when two public meetings were held in Bombay. At this time, Mr. M. N. Lokhanday formed the first trade union in India, known as the Mill Hands’ Association, of which he was Chairman. Mr. Lokhanday drew up a programme in regard to hours of work and weekly rest. At this time, one Mr James Jones, an English Factory Inspector, was appointed the first permanent special inspector in India by the Government of Bombay. He made a report after four years’ survey in which he stated that most of these factories worked from sunrise to sunset, Sundays being

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\*Ibid, No. 37.

usually working days, and that the industries were extremely prosperous, several mills having been paid back the whole of their capital in four years. Even in those days, Mr. James Jones remarked upon the system of Managing Agencies :—

“ The greatest curse to the trade is the abominable system so generally followed by the mill agent of deducting a percentage for management on the output, whether the goods have been made to profit or loss. Added to this injustice he frequently charges commission on all coal and mill stores which he has supplied to the factory, leaving the poor shareholder nothing except the knowledge that the Agent is waxing rich while he is growing poor. ”

Pressure in England was kept up, and certain members of the House of Commons in 1889 made representations to the Secretary of State for amending the Indian Factories' Act.

I am not here reviewing the history of Indian factory legislation, except in so far as that history throws light upon the exploitation of the Indian millhand. I have already stated that, with the introduction of electric light, Bombay factories frequently worked for 14 hours a day.\* In 1896, there was an epidemic of plague. The labour force was reduced to one-third of its total complement, and it is stated that there were actual auctions for labourers at street corners in Bombay, owing to the scarcity of labour. Auctions, as if it were a slave market! And this almost at the beginning of the present century!

Between 1892 and 1902, *i. e.*, within a period of 10 years, such was the prosperity of the industry that the number of Factories under the Factories' Act increased from 656 employing 3,17,000 people to 1,533 employing 5,42,000 people. The condition of the workers nevertheless continued to be terrible in the extreme, until, on the 13th September 1905, Mr. Lovat Fraser could not contain himself with indignation and was compelled to pen a terrible indictment in the “Times of India”, under the heading “Bombay's Slaves.” Here are a few extracts :—

“ But in regard to the excessive hours of adult labour, the mill-owners, and more particularly the mill agents, are, first and last, wholly and solely to blame. The mill agents are the worst offenders; they are the people who benefit most, rather than the shareholders; the rotten system of commission on outturn is the predominant contributory cause. If the shareholders did but realise it, there is little additional benefit to them from working the

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\*Ibid, No. 39.

mills an excessive number of hours. But the system goes on, and no check is placed on the capacity and greed that is working the life out of tens of thousands of helpless impotent people. The dividends roll in, the millowners pass pious resolutions, but the iniquity continues, the bitter cry of the oppressed workers is unheard. Let those who think the story is exaggerated, watch, as we did, the saddening and unforgettable sight of these jaded and forlorn victims of the Moloch of gain hurrying to their work once more, after snatching a few hours' sleep while—

Beyond the darkness

God made Himself an awful rose of Dawn

Unheeded."

He ends up by saying :—

"It is only fair to the responsible authorities, both in the Bombay Government and the Government of India, to state that they are already alive to the realities of the case, and are understood to be considering it ; but if nothing is done, the sin and the shame of this iniquitous system of semi-slavery must ultimately lie at the doors of the Government of India."

The result was that the Factory Labour Commission was appointed in 1907, which reported that even half-timers were doing the full day's work of 13½ hours, and in some mills visited by the Commission, the operatives, they stated, worked for over 14 hours a day. This was the tale throughout the length and breadth of India, as reported by this Commission. The result was the introduction of the Indian Factories' Bill of 1911, and when the Select Committee reported, the provision for the restriction of adult hours was passed by the majority of 1—8 voting for it and 7 against it—and amongst the 7 there was strangely enough the name of Mr. G. K. Gokhale !

Such were the dreadful conditions of work in the textile factories of India almost right down to the year 1911. The fact to be borne in mind is this ; that, with all the latitude and the lack of restrictions permitted to the capitalists in this industry, they should have been in a position to build up an unassailable position, from the competitive point of view, upon the carcase of the working classes. When I deal subsequently with the more recent history of this industry this fact should not be forgotten.

Now, imagine the condition of a worker who arrives in Bombay in order to find employment in one of the mills operated by the big syndicates. If he is fortunate enough to obtain a job as a spinner, a weaver, a reeler, or a carder, let us say, on the first day of the month, then it is not until after a period of six weeks that he obtains his wages in the Bombay textile factories, which are paid on the 15th of the month following the

month of employment. Meanwhile, it must be noted that the worker has produced wealth for a period of six weeks. What he gets is but a small proportion of the wealth produced by his labour, thus bearing out the dictum of Henry George that wages are paid not out of capital but out of the wealth produced by the worker himself. Here is a worker ill-nourished and a victim of malaria, typhoid and cholera. Indeed the employers make a chronic complaint of, what they call, absenteeism, and there is undoubtedly great necessity for workers to migrate to a village home almost every year for the purpose of recuperation. Such absenteeism, unemployment, sickness, bring down considerably the fanciful wage averages of the statistical expert. Along with this must be reckoned the fact that fines are deducted from the gross wage, as well as the fact that high interest rates are paid for loans raised by the worker, and high rent for his accommodation. It would be safe to reduce the average figure of Rs 30-10-6 to the sum of Rs. 24 on which the worker-in a city like Bombay has to bring up and educate a family. It must not be forgotten that in order to provide a decent stable, not for a race-horse but for an ordinary pony, in the city of Bomby, the rent charged alone is between Rs. 30 to Rs. 35 a month.

The cotton Mills which paid not a pie in dividends in 1914 made in 1920 unheard-of profits :—

|                          | Dividends                                                                 |      |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
|                          | 1914                                                                      | 1920 |
| <i>Union Mills :—</i>    | Nil                                                                       | 55%  |
|                          | Paid up 5 lakhs. Reserves and Block Account nearly 39 lakhs.              |      |
| <i>Vishnu Mills :—</i>   | Nil                                                                       | 40%  |
|                          | Paid up 12 lakhs. Reserves and Block Account over 72½ lakhs.              |      |
| <i>Sivan Mills :—</i>    | Nil                                                                       | 68%  |
|                          | Paid up Capital 10 lakhs. Reserves and Block Account over 32 lakhs.       |      |
| <i>Pearl Mills :—</i>    | Nil                                                                       | 72%  |
|                          | Paid up Capital nearly 20 lakhs. Reserves and Block Account over 62 lakhs |      |
| <i>Globe Mills :—</i>    | Nil                                                                       | 30%  |
|                          | Paid up Capital 10 lakhs. Reserves and Block Account nearly 34½ lakhs.    |      |
| <i>Bradbury Mills :—</i> | Nil                                                                       | 80%  |
|                          | Paid up 10 lakhs. Reserves and Block Account over 35 lakhs.               |      |
| <i>Century Mills :—</i>  | Nil                                                                       | 80%  |
|                          | Paid up 22 lakhs. Reserves and Block Account 117 lakhs.                   |      |

Many of these Mills have actually borrowed the money as they have borrowed the labour of workers and are making these stupendous profits out of capital which really did not belong to them and labour which they exploit.

*Globe Mills :—*

Paid up capital ten lakhs. Mortgage and Debentures ten lakhs thirty thousand. Reserves and Block Account 34½ lakhs. Dividend 1920: 30%.

*Pearl Mills :—*

Paid up capital nearly 20 lakhs. Mortgage and Debentures 15 lakhs. Reserves and Block Account over 62 lakhs. Dividend 1920: 72%.

*Bradbury Mills :—*

Paid up capital 10 lakhs. Mortgage and Debentures 10 lakhs. Reserves and Block Account over 35 lakhs. Dividend 1920: 80%.

After the end of the War there was a steady depression in the cotton textile industry of Bombay. According to the Tariff Board's Report 1927, Vol. 1, page 4, the Bombay Millowners' Association considered that the seeds of the present depression were sown in 1893 with the closure of the mints in India to the free coinage of silver to which they attribute the loss of the China trade in yarn. It must be remembered that, in the cotton mill industry which was essentially a spinning industry, nearly half the yarn produced was exported during the pre-war period. When we come to the end of this period we find that, although the spindles had increased by 39%, the number of looms had increased by no less than 142%. This change was the result of the decreasing importance of the export trade in yarn, the exports of manufactured yarn having fallen from 47·4 per cent to 30·3 per cent. Taking the war period, the number of cotton mills working in Bombay during 1914-18 was 86 and in the rest of India 163. Bombay possessed 43·9 per cent of the spindles and 51 per cent of the looms. Bombay produced 49·7 per cent of the yarn and 50·7 per cent of the cloth. During this period the number of looms had increased in Bombay by 25 per cent. In the post-war years 1919-22 the position remained more or less the same, the number of mills for Bombay being 33·8 per cent. of the whole of India; the number of spindles 44·1 per cent. and the number of looms 50·7 per cent.; production being 50·3 of yarn and 51·3 of cotton cloth. During the war and post-war years enormous profits had been made by the mill industry and it was not until July 1917 that the all-round increase over the individual rates for each mill as shown in what is known as its "standard muster" was given by the grant of a "war bonus" of 10 per cent which was increased to 15 per cent on the 1st January 1918. The Tariff Board states that the prosperity of the cotton textile industry in these years was due to world causes. The review of Indian trade for 1920-21 pointed out that the slump set in with the decline of exports from this country from the high water mark of Rs. 31½ crores in March 1913, but that the cotton mill industry was not affected for several months, as in 1920 it made a huge profit of 10·1 crores and in 1921 it was short of this total by 1·7 crores. The Tariff Board says in its Report :—

'As usual in a period of rising prosperity, wages lagged behind profits. The first substantial rise in wages was granted with effect from January 20, 1919, when the 15 per cent. war bonus was increased to 35 per cent and termed a special allowance on account of the high prices of foodstuffs. The allowance was further increased to 55 per cent. on January 24, 1920, for operatives on fixed wages and for winders, the allowance for piece-workers other than winders being raised to 75 per cent. It was again raised to 70 per cent. on November 30, 1920, for operatives on fixed pay and winders and to 80 per cent. for other piece-workers."

As already mentioned, the hours of labour in cotton mills were reduced from 12 to 10 in January 1920. In the opinion of the Tariff Board,\* the expansion of spinning during this period has been the result of the expansion of weaving rather than the reverse. While spindles increased by 50 per cent. in the 22 years surveyed, looms increased by 223 per cent. In 1899-1900, Indian mills supplied 9 per cent. of Indian requirements of cloth against 64 per cent. met by imports and 23 per cent. by the handloom industry. In 1921-22 the percentages were 42, 26 and 32 respectively for Indian mills production, imports and handloom industry. The position in 1925 is that Bombay contains 28.8 per cent. of the total number of mills working, 41.7 per cent. of the number of spindles and 48 per cent. of the number of looms. It produced 38.2 per cent. of the cotton yarn and 43 per cent. of the cloth. This reveals the fact that upcountry mill industry has expanded considerably during the four years ending 1925.

During the boom period in Bombay there was a great increase in the cost of production. The capital investment of the industry almost doubled between 1917-18 and 1921-22, the increase being Rs. 20.84 crores and 40.98 crores respectively.† After this year the paid-up capital of mills in British India fell slightly whereas that in Indian States continued to advance, in 1921-22 it being 1.82 crores for 34 mills and 4.88 crores for 51 mills in 1923-24. The Millowners, faced with a slump, endeavoured to reduce their costs, but their attempts to reduce wages were completely frustrated. The Report says: "There has been no change in wages in the Bombay industry during the period under review, except that the yearly bonus of one month's wages which had been paid during the boom years was discontinued at the beginning of 1924, causing the unsuccessful strike in January of that year. An attempt to reduce wages by 11½ per cent in September 1925 was followed by the strike of 2½ months' duration which was terminated by the Mill-

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\*Ibid, p. 12.

†Tariff Board's Report for 1927, p. 18.

owners agreeing, on the removal of the excise duty, to retain wages at their old level." But in Ahmedabad it was a different story. In June 1923 the Millowners of Ahmedabad reduced the wages of the workers by 51½ per cent. in spite of a strike which lasted nearly 2½ months.

It is not necessary here to go into the defects in the internal organization of the cotton industry, as a detailed survey of this subject will be found in the Tariff Board's Report.\* One of the chief defects was over-capitalization during the boom period and capitalization at inflated values, cases being known, *e. g.*, the Diamond Mill which was recently bought by the Japanese, which increased its capital by nearly 5 lakhs without any increase in looms or spindles. Take the case of the Finlay Mills, which had a capital of 20 lakhs in 1918 but increased it to Rs. 40 lakhs in 1925 without any increase in spindles or looms.† The Swan Mills in 1918 had a capital of 10 lakhs but in 1925 increased it to Rs. 24 lakhs without any increase in spindles or looms. These are typical cases of the watering down of capital through the issue of bonus shares by means of the capitalization of reserves. In fact nearly thirty of the eighty-three mills in Bombay were said to have been affected by the "tendency to over-investment in the boom period".‡ In Ahmedabad it was a different story where this tendency to over-investment was not so marked as in Bombay.†† The Tariff Board held that this tendency undoubtedly accentuates a depression and since dividends on watered-down capital cannot be paid or are small, the reserves or depreciation funds cannot be added to. In fact, the Tariff Board says:—

"An examination of the balance sheets of the Bombay mills furnishes convincing evidence that those mills which did not increase their capital during the boom period are now in the strongest position."

The second cause was the distribution of dividends in the boom period. In 1920, 35 companies comprising 42 mills declared dividends of 40 per cent. and over, of which 10 companies comprising 14 mills paid 100 per cent. and over, and two mills paid over 200 per cent. In order to raise the value of the shares in the market, the millowners of Bombay went to the length of paying out 192 lakhs in dividends out of the net profits in 1918 of 228 lakhs. Thirdly there is the managing-agency system which has three systems of remuneration in force, *viz*,

§(1) The system of remuneration by commission on profits. The commission in Bombay ranges from 7½ per cent. to 12½ per cent ;

\*P. 78 of Report for 1927.

†Ibid, p. 79.

††Ibid, p. 81.

§Ibid, p. 87.

(2) The system of commission on production. The usual rate of commission is three pies per pound ; and

(3) The system of commission on sales, the rate being usually  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. Several managing agents are also agents of Fire Insurance Companies. They insure their companies themselves and draw their Commission. Other factors included insufficient machinery and finance. However, taking the period of depression along with the boom years, keeping fully in view the question that capital in the Bombay mills has been watered down to a great extent, we find that from 1917 to 1925 (inclusive) the Bombay cotton industry *has paid out nearly 178 per cent. in dividends compared with the total paid-up capital invested in that industry.* Now this is an astounding return. While millions have been made by this industry, the wage, that is being paid to the workers, is not a living wage, nor is it a satisfactory wage from the point of view of the lack of standardization, as wages in the Bombay mill industry vary from mill to mill.

A new factor arose recently which was the cause of the last strike and that was the question of rationalization. The Trade Disputes Committee, 1928-29, went into the causes of the dispute most carefully. The grievances of the workers prior to the strike were as follows :—\*

(1) Direct cut in wages.

(2) Reduction in monthly earnings owing to the following indirect causes :—

- (a) Introduction of new varieties of cloth at rates which did not bring the level of wages to those earned on the production of the old sorts ;
- (b) Reduction of piece-rates to meet unanticipated high production by individual operatives ;
- (c) Adjustments in rates made to bring them in line with the rates prevailing in other mills ;
- (d) No adjustments made to increase rates in cases where mills went on to finer counts ;
- (e) Introduction of artificial silk and inferior raw material ;
- (f) Gradual withdrawal of bonuses such as good attendance and efficiency bonus, free railway passes to workers, etc. ;
- (g) Introduction of a method of paying wages on the weight of the cloth after it had undergone a subsequent process, instead of on the actual weight produced on the looms ;

(3) The introduction of new methods of work, involving a reduction in the number of operatives employed, notably in the Sassoon Group (*i.e.*, three-

loom and double frame working) and the fear of the spread of this system to other mills in the city.

(4) The increase in the hours of work of mechanics in some mills from 8½ hours to 10 hours per day, and the declaration of a general intention to level up the hours of work for all mill operatives in all mills to 10 hours per day.

The Report states :—

“In addition to the above, there were several minor grievances in connection with the infliction of fines, dismissals, the practice of handing over spoilt cloth to the weavers in lieu of wages, etc. It would, we think, serve no useful purpose to get at length into the exact causes of the General Strike, or to attempt to apportion blame for it on either side. There were no doubt various contributory causes, but in our opinion it can be safely said that the chief reason for its commencement and continuation for a period of nearly six months was the fear of unemployment created by the new methods of work introduced by Messrs. E. D. Sassoon and Company in their mills.”

The Millowners' Association on the 12th of May 1928 issued a statement to the press giving categorical replies to the “Seventeen Demands” put forward by the workers. A settlement was reached on the 4th of October after a very strenuous fight lasting nearly six months—a strike which could not have lasted so long but for the assistance given to Bombay labour by a number of International organizations of workers. The basis of the settlement was the appointment of a Committee of Enquiry by Government and work was resumed on the 6th of October.

The following 17 Demands were made by the millhands :—

1. The present practice resorted to by some millowners which results in the reduction of wages shall be stopped, and reduction and altered conditions already effected since 1925 shall be restored.
2. That where the daily hours of work of any class of workers are at present less than 10, the hours shall not be raised to 10, without the consent of the workers concerned expressed through their organisations. When the hours are thus increased, the workmen shall be paid for the same at the unusual overtime rates.
3. That the millowners shall not vary any of the present conditions to the disadvantage of the workers before securing the approval of the workers through their organization.
4. That the Millowners' Association shall not permit its individual

members to vary conditions of service to the disadvantage of the workers without the sanction of the Association.

5. The rates of new varieties shall be fixed by the Millowners' Association in consultation with the representatives of the workers' organizations.
  6. Notices in vernacular showing the rates of piecework in detail should be posted in the departments for the information of the workers.
  7. The system by which each worker is required to look after 3 looms or the whole frame (2 sides) should not be introduced or continued without the consultation and free consent of the workers expressed through their organisations.
  8. The wages of those workers whose average monthly wage is less than Rs. 30 shall be raised substantially.
  9. The rules regarding the forfeiture of wages remaining unclaimed for a certain period should be done away with.
  10. The conditions of employment, work and payment should be standardized.
  11. The newly introduced system of compelling the workmen (a) to take out and present tickets of attendance and (b) to clean the machinery daily should be discontinued.
  12. The present high prices allowances should be consolidated with the original wages.
  13. One month's notice must be given by either side before termination of the contract of service.
  14. The Millowners' Association should make standard rules for the guidance of its members regarding the grant of leave to their employees.
  15. All the rules that are usually posted in the mills or departments should be standardized by the Millowners' Association so that they shall be uniform in all the mills. That none of these rules or regulations shall be such as may deprive the workers of their rights, conferred on them by the existing law, goes without saying.
  16. Employment in the Weaving Department of the mills should be opened to members of the so-called "depressed classes."
  17. That there shall be no victimization of men who have taken part in the present dispute, or in their Union activities.
- The general results of the enquiry are summarised in their report on

pages 166 to 171 and related to a recommendation that the standardization scheme should be enforced on the one hand and the threatened cut in wages withdrawn on the other.\*

As a result of some of the factors enumerated by me of utter mismanagement and imprudence on the part of millowners, partly the result of what in capitalistic parlance is known as depression following upon a boom, certain Indian mills found themselves in difficulties in the year 1925, and in particular the mills operating in Bombay. In December 1925, as a result of threats against the workers, menacing wage cuts which led to a strike, the Government assisted the cotton industry to the extent of abolishing entirely the excise duty which in former years had been levied in the interests of Lancashire. Soon there was a demand for protection over and above the revenue duties already payable, which indirectly assisted the cotton industry. In April 1930, the Cotton Textile Industry (Protection) Act was passed and the following was its effect :—

(a) Plain grey that is not bleached or dyed in the piece, if imported in pieces, which either are without woven headings or contain any length of more than nine yards which is not divided by transverse woven headings :—

(i) Of British manufacture : Ad valorem 15 per cent., or  $3\frac{1}{2}$  annas per lb. whichever is higher.

(ii) Not British manufacture : Ad valorem 20 per cent., or  $3\frac{1}{2}$  annas per lb. whichever is higher.

(b) Others :—

(i) Of British manufacture : Ad valorem 15 per cent.

(ii) Not British manufacture : Ad valorem 20 per cent.

In 1931, there has been a further increase of revenue duty by five per cent. later followed by an all-round surcharge of 25 per cent.

In this Act there was discrimination in favour of Lancashire which created a serious political upheaval in the country. The plea that was raised by the Indian millowners was firstly that they could not compete favourably with Lancashire and secondly that they could not compete favourably with Japan and that, therefore, they needed protection for their industry by making the consumer pay for their own incompetence and mismanagement. For an industry, which for three quarters of a century has marched ahead, capturing markets overywere in India, and which claims after this long period of gestation that it is incapable of competing with Britain and Japan must undoubtedly be in the hands of incompetent and inefficient capitalists. Raw material is at the doors of these mills. Cheap labour is at their command—

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\*Report of the Bombay Strike Enquiry Committee, 1928-29.

indeed we have seen how cheap that labour is! A market of over three hundred million purchasers is at the factory gate. And yet the countries, which import Indian cotton thousands of miles away, pay very much higher wages to their workers, pay duties, freight and interest charges, according to our capitalists, are in a better position to compete with the Indian mills.

One is tempted to ask what is wrong with this industry? Let us examine facts. The Indian millowner says that Japan, because she has not ratified the Hours' Convention, is in a better position, because she can employ women at night and work the double shift. This is an absolutely misleading statement. If Japan does not strictly follow the Convention, nor does India—a fact admitted by the Government of India. In Japan they stop work at 11 p. m. instead of at 10, as in India, but they start work at 5-30 a. m. instead of at 5 as in India—a difference of half an hour only. Some bright young lad in the office of the Millowners' Association must have seen this fact in print and immediately rushed to the conclusion that the real reasons why Japan was in a better position to compete with India was because Japanese women were able to work an hour longer at night. Now if this were so—that the night work of women in Japan gives the Japanese an advantage over India—there might be something in the argument. As a matter of fact, the wages that are paid to a Japanese woman worker in the mills in Japan are higher than the wages paid to a male mill-hand in Bombay. Where then is the advantage?

Let us now take the case of Lancashire. It is a well-known fact that, in competing with rivals, British industry has to face an enormous increase in taxation, both Imperial and local. An illustration of what this means to cotton was given by Mr. Dewhurst to the shareholders of William Deakins & Co., when he quoted the annual report of the Oldham Master Cotton & Spinners' Association, to the effect that for a typical mill in the Oldham District, the actual percentage of increase in cost over 1914 of one pound of weight of yarn was 174 per cent. for local rates, 277 per cent. in income-tax and 640 per cent. for health, pensions and unemployment insurance. Be it noted that welfare charges are a burden upon the Japanese industry as well but that they are not a burden upon Indian industry. There is no such thing as welfare work generally or health insurance for the Indian worker, and yet, with the higher wages paid to the foreign worker, it was contended, with a great deal of assurance by the Indian millowner, that he was not in a position to compete with his rivals.

This statement is not even borne out by actual facts if we look at the actual production. Take the case of *dhotis*. In 1914, Lancashire was importing roughly 800 million yards. I do not take the low figures of 1928-29

because these are vitiated by the strike which was waged by the workers in Bombay and finally brought to a successful conclusion. In 1927-28, Lancashire dropped its imports into India from 800 million yards to 493 million yards—a drop of 313 million yards.

What has been the story of Indian production in regard to *dhotis*? In 1914, the production was 285 million yards. It increased in 1927-28 to 661 million yards or an increase of 331 million yards. Japan imports into India 30 million yards of *dhotis*. It is said that these are a competitive quantity. Indeed they are not. Indian production is usually below forties and very rarely above forties. The Japanese imports are 40 warp and 40 weft or 42 warp and 42 weft. There is no competition.

Take the case of long-cloth and shirtings. Lancashire imported into India 540 million yards in 1914. In 1927 the figure dropped to 77 million yards, and there has been a further drop since, practically wiping off the trade of Lancashire in this class of goods. And who has captured this trade? The Indian millowner. In 1914, the Indian mill production stood at 292 million yards. In 1927-28 it increased to 620 million yards.

Take the case of coloured goods. In 1914, 770 million yards were imported into India from Lancashire, while in 1927-28 the figure stood at 352 million yards only. India advanced in the same period from 292 million yards to 681 million yards, that is to say, Lancashire lost 418 million yards and India gained 389 million yards. Practically the entire decrease of Lancashire was captured by India.

The next category is white bleached goods. Indian production is practically nil. Imports from Lancashire are 520 million yards, and when protection was asked for, this item was also included in the list, although we do not produce white bleached goods. It does not matter who suffers and we know who it is that suffers (the consumer)—so long as the millowners can gain a hypothetical advantage.

It must be noted that the total amount of *dhotis* and shirtings produced in India is 1,232 million yards as against the imports from Japan of 190 million yards. Is it to be understood that the great millowners of India are so nervous that they cannot sleep of a night afraid of a paltry figure of 190 million yards of imports from Japan that they want protection for their industry? And yet curiously enough the plea that was advanced by Indian millowners was that this country is poor. The per capita consumption of Indian cloth in India has gone down (being recently estimated variously) from 16 yards per head to 12 yards per head per annum, and it was admitted by the spokesman of the Indian capitalists in the Legislative Assembly (April 1930) that "this decrease is due to the gradual impoverishment of the people of this country." Are the Indian

capitalists going to make the Indian masses happier by raising the price of cloth that they wear ?

On page 27 of the Tariff Board's Report there is a statement in regard to upcountry mills, which reads as follows :—

“Efficiently-managed mills in upcountry centres which have both spinning and weaving departments have with very few exceptions continued to pay dividends throughout the whole of the period. All the five mills in Sholapur, the most important centre in the Bombay Presidency outside Bombay and Ahmedabad, have paid satisfactory dividends throughout. Of the twelve mills in the Madras Presidency for which we have obtained balance sheets all except very small mills, which are spinning mills only, have paid dividends as have also the two mills in Mysore. Of the two mills in Nagpur, one is, as it always has been, in an exceptionally strong position and the other, a new mill which started work at the end of 1923, made a profit during the year ending 31st March, 1926, though it was not in a position to declare a dividend. The position in Cawnpore is not quite so satisfactory. Of the four mills in that centre from which we have obtained balance sheets, one paid a dividend in 1923, 1924 and 1925 and one in the two latter years. Of the others, one is a new mill started in the war period and the other a boom flotation.”

That is one of the troubles with this industry.

“The largest mill in Delhi paid a dividend of 32 per cent. for 1925. The leading mill in Indore paid a dividend of 47½ per cent. for 1925. These figures are sufficient to show what was generally admitted in evidence we received that upcountry mills with the exception of those which have spinning departments only are, generally speaking, in a much better position than the Bombay mills.”

Then further it says :—

“It is important to note that the Ahmedabad Millowners' Association in their oral evidence stated that their demand for 12½ per cent protection was not limited to the same grounds as those advanced by the Bombay Millowners' Association but was mainly on the general ground of the desirability of protection as it would enable the mill industry in this country to establish itself firmly in the manufacture of finer qualities of cloth.”

But barring some that lost, enormous profits were made by many of the mills in the post-boom period. Take for instance Ahmedabad's. In 1928 they paid 20 per cent. dividend ; in 1929, 21 per cent. Take Central India ; in 1928.

26 per cent and in 1929 28 per cent. Indore, 26 $\frac{1}{4}$  per cent. in 1928 and 20 per cent in 1929. Mysore, 24 per cent 1928 and 20 per cent. in 1929. Sholapur, 52 $\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. in 1928 and 35 per cent. in 1929.

Mr. Arno S. Pearse says of Japanese Mills :—

"It will be noted the members of the Employers' Association are obliged to supply most comprehensive particulars and statistics very promptly, at fixed and stated dates. This ensures that such information is up-to-date and enables prompt action to be taken. Coupled with the fact that approximately 70 per cent. of the spindles and 65 per cent. of the organized looms are owned by nine combines, it will be seen that control of the industry is much more possible and effective than is the case in most other competing countries."

When in 1927 I asked Sir George Rainy, when he was putting up the price of cotton yarns, what guarantee there was that the millowners of Bombay would not compete and thus handicap the handloom weaver in this country, the reply given by Sir George Rainy was that there was no such developed organization among the millowners which would enable them to take this joint action. Nevertheless, prices did go up, and here is a charge against the millowners. There is no central control or organization capable of effecting the necessary amount of reorganization required in order to put this industry on a proper basis to compete with Lancashire, Japan or any other country.

Now, further, Mr. Pearse says :—

"This organized control extends from the buying of the raw cotton to placing the manufactured goods in the hands of the consumers. New styles and patterns which appeal to buyers can be produced and delivered promptly. Policy generally in regard to buying, selling, counts of yards spun, types of cloth manufactured can be quickly determined and concentration secured in every process to ensure the best results."

That is because of this intelligent, scientific, central control of the industry from the very first process right up to the last, from the purchase of the raw material to the marketing of the manufactured produce. There is no such thing in Bombay. We have not heard of any; all that the millowners have done is to cut each other's throats; all that they know is *laissez-faire*; to let things go their own way until a calamity comes and then demand protection.

India has a market at its door with 350 million people who can be supplied with all their needs, India has its raw material at its door, India has the cheapest labour at its door, and yet India is unable to compete with

Lancashire and Japan—a proposition which on the face of it is absurd. In the circumstances we have no business to subsidise incompetence. Here is a further final proof of it. When in 1924-25 the index number of raw cotton was 272, the price of greys was 4 annas 10 pies; from 272 the index figure had dropped to 167 in 1928-29, and yet the cost remained the same: 4 annas 10 pies. With the cheapest raw material, with this tremendous drop in the price of it, with wages not having gone up during that period, why have not the millowners been able to reduce their cost of production? What is wrong with them?

What is wrong with the cotton textile industry in India is not that it needs protection, but that the nation needs protection against the mill-owner. No industry can stand the incompetence of three generations, and generally speaking the cotton mill industry in India is a hereditary business. Under the Managing-Agency system, the business is handed down from father to son, and it is an admitted fact that one of the causes of the troubles of this industry is the incompetence and the lack of technical knowledge of the Managing Agents.

There was a time, not long ago, when the Managing Agents drew their commission on production. Some do so still. The Managing Agent will insure his mill in an insurance company of which he himself is an agent. Cases are not unknown of speculation indulged in by Managing Agents and the losses debited to the mills and profits pocketed by them.

Bombay is the great gambling centre of the Stock Exchange. No industry in which the prices of the raw material, as a result of speculation of the Stock Exchange manipulators, fluctuate as much as they do in the case of cotton, can stand the onslaught of the more intelligent competitor like Japan, who, because of the system which it has adopted and the resources which it has at its command, can actually purchase raw cotton from Bombay cheaper than the Bombay millowner can purchase it in Bombay. The policy of *laissez-faire* in regard to the control of an industry like the cotton mill industry in India spells ruination for the nation, for the producer and for the worker. Crores of rupees have been extracted out of the pocket of the consumer in India by the millowners of this country with the connivance and active assistance of the Government, afraid of the cry of protection and more protection. This industry could be easily nationalized in the interests of the nation, in the interests of the cotton grower and in the interests of the worker, who would no longer be at the mercy of the vagaries either of the Stock Exchange speculator or of the mill magnate, whose sole right to control this industry lies in the fact that he happens to be his father's son.

How do the cotton operatives live? In Bombay they live in separate tenements known as "chawls" or in sheds built of corrugated iron, empty kerosene tins, wood and mud plaster, or in a little hovel constructed of dry leaves of coconut palms. One author\* states that, as a result of his personal inspection, he carried away recollections which he could not easily forget. He entered a shed and passed down a dark, narrow passage, groping his way to the door-ways of the room. So dark were these rooms that it was impossible to find whether they were occupied or not, and although outside the bright Indian sun was shining, not a ray of light penetrated into these dark dungeons. Let Mr. Burnett-Hurst speak for himself :—

"Many of these sheds have roofs and walls made from flattened-out kerosene tins. There are no windows; holes in the rusty tin walls and roof provide the interior with a sufficiency of light and air. The floor is about 3 inches from the ground. As sanitary conveniences are absent, the ground in the vicinity of these structures is generally defæcated."†

Later on, he says :—"Here was a room with a floor space of 6 feet by 9 feet, part of the space being occupied by the *chula* (fire-place). The sole window of the room overlooked a gully reeking with filth into which we had previously witnessed a basket of human excreta being emptied by a sweeper woman. Where the privies are not detached from the main building stench penetrates the whole structure. Frequently, on rounds of inspection, premises have been entered, but the filth and the smell have been so repulsive as to compel a hurried exit. The room was occupied by two adults, a boy of three years and an infant. The tenants had been paying Rs. 2 per month for the room, but in 1918 the landlord demanded double the amount, finally agreeing to Rs. 3-8-0, an increase of 75 per cent."‡

Dr. Sandilands, Health Officer of Bombay, in his annual report of 1921, said :—

"The fact is to be faced that for the city as a whole, including as it does an unduly large proportion of the very poorest class, the infantile mortality cannot, after every allowance has been made for various sources of fallacy, be fairly estimated at less than 500, which means that one out of every two infants born has to die before reaching the age of 12 months."

\*Burnett-Hurst in *Labour and Housing in Bombay*, p. 19.

†Ibid, p. 20.

‡Ibid, p. 22.

Bombay possesses the highest infant death-rate in the world.

In 1917, the "Times of India," in an article dated the 5th of April, made an onslaught on those responsible for these conditions :—

"When we survey the condition of the industrial proletariat in Bombay we are filled with shame and anger. What is the constant complaint we hear from large employers of labour? It is the actual shortage and unreliability of the labour force. Both these drawbacks arise directly from the abominable conditions in which our industrial proletariat lives. All our labour difficulties arise from this one overwhelming fact, that we have not, and we do not deserve to have, a permanent and reasonably contented labour force. Lacking it, we are driven to all sorts of shifts and expedients to mitigate the evil. Jobbers are left in almost uncontrolled mastery of the mill operatives, because that is the only way in which labour can be secured. Wages have to be kept in arrears, because that is the only way in which labour can be kept in steady work. In these and various other ways the labourer does not secure the benefit of the wages which he is actually paid. Nor will he until two great changes are effected. First we have to see that every workman has a chance of securing decent housing at a reasonable rent. Next we have to secure, through the universal diffusion of primary education, that every adult is placed in a position of self-protection against the usurer and the jobber.....If we neglect our labour force, as we have neglected it, as we are continuing to neglect it, then we are deliberately and wilfully sapping the foundations of our future industrial greatness."

This is just as true to-day as it was in 1917.

What is the furniture to be found in these bestial dungeons possessed by the mill-hands? A deal box, a worn-out mat, a few earthen pots, a brass basin, a drinking cup, open tin lamps fed with rock oil for lighting purposes. Each occupant has a blanket. Sometimes the bare floor, sometimes a torn sheet or a much-used mat spread upon it do for a bed at night—rows of prone figures lying side by side.

An enquiry into indebtedness in the Parel area (Bombay) disclosed the fact that 51 per cent. of the households were in debt and that the chief causes of indebtedness were illness, unemployment, insufficiency of wages, repayment of debts and social ceremonies.

In 1917-18 it was discovered through an enquiry that was conducted that in that very area 97 per cent. of the working class house-

holds were living in single rooms—a figure which was confirmed by a later enquiry officially conducted in 1921. It was also discovered that 60 per cent. of the households were overcrowded according to the official English standard, but that the percentage, according to Dr. Bowley's test in his book "Livelihood and Poverty," would rise to 94 per cent. According to the 1921 census, there were no less than 135 instances in which a single room in Bombay was occupied by six families, or more. One investigator discovered in one room 15 ft. by 12 ft. no less than six families, consisting of 30 adults and children living in that one room. Three out of the six women in that room were shortly expecting to be delivered.\*

In the mill areas of Cawnpore as well as of the Imperial City of Delhi, I have seen working-class families living in dug-outs below the ground level, with holes on the ground level for doors, where you have to go on all fours in order to obtain an entrance. Any visitor at night in the mill area of Bombay will see hundreds of workers, unable to obtain accommodation or unable to pay for it, sleeping on the pavements. It is estimated that nearly forty thousand workers are provided free housing accommodation of this kind by the Municipality, which owns these pavements!

Major Webb, Health Officer, the Imperial City of New Delhi, was asked:—†

"You stated that during the war you yourself lived three years in huts?—I lived in dug-outs which were under the ground and most unpleasant."

"Would you more or less compare the housing arrangements with those dug-outs?—The dug-outs were worse really, but it is not possible to say that it is absolutely impossible to live in them."

One result of congestion is that whereas mortality from tuberculosis in the United Provinces in urban parts was 1·83 and in rural parts ·01, yet in the chief industrial city of Cawnpore in the United Provinces, the rate was 5·05 as against 1·41 of Manchester. And it is a well-known fact that the statistics collected in regard to this matter and in regard to all such matters are proverbially defective, inasmuch as they give an under-estimate rather than an over-estimate.††

\*Report of the Lady Doctor appointed by the Government of Bombay to report upon the condition of women workers in the Industrial quarters of Bombay, 1922.

† Royal Commission on Labour, Vol. II. p. 153.

†† Labour and Housing in India by Gupta, pp. 116-117.

Let me give some of the dividends earned by these mills during the worst periods from 1925 to 1929 :—

| Name of Mill.                                      | Dividend rate per cent. per annum<br>for |       |       |       |                |
|----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|----------------|
|                                                    | 1925.                                    | 1926. | 1927. | 1928. | 1929.          |
| Ahmedabad Advance ...                              | 24                                       | 24    | 22    | 20    | 21             |
| Bengal-Nagpur Cotton Mills ...                     | ...                                      | ...   | 60    | 70    | 40<br>(½ Yly.) |
| Bombay Dyeing and Manufacturing Co., Ltd           | 20                                       | 20    | 20    | 20    | ...            |
| Buckingham and Carnatic Co. ...                    | ...                                      | ...   | 20    | 20    | 10<br>(½ Yly.) |
| Central India Spinning, Weaving and Manufacturing. | 34                                       | 32    | 30    | 28    | 26             |
| Indore-Malwa United Mills ...                      | 32½                                      | 31½   | 20    | 26½   | 26½            |
| Lakshmi Cotton Manufacturing, Co., Ltd.            | 45                                       | 45    | 45    | 36    | ...            |
| Muir Mills, Co., Ltd. ...                          | 50                                       | 60    | 65    | 55    | ...            |
| Phoenix Mills, Ltd. ...                            | ...                                      | 10    | 25    | 10    | ...            |
| Sholapoor Spinning and Weaving Co., Ltd.           | 100*                                     | 70    | 52½   | 52½   | 35             |
| Swadeshi Mill Co., Ltd. ...                        | 34                                       | 32    | 30    | 20    | ...            |
| Vishnu Cotton Mill, Ltd. ...                       | 30                                       | 30    | 30    | 24    | ...            |

\* Includes bonus.

## STATISTICS.

| Area.                        |     |     |     | Total<br>No. of<br>cotton<br>mills. | Total amount<br>of capital<br>paid up. | Average<br>number of<br>hands<br>employed<br>daily. |
|------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Bombay Island                | ... | ... | ... | 81                                  | 147,563,465                            | 106,710                                             |
| Bombay Presidency            | ... | ... | ... | 130                                 | 92,394,074                             | 107,505                                             |
| Rajputana                    | ... | ... | ... | 5                                   | 3,423,495                              | 2,641                                               |
| Berar                        | ... | ... | ... | 4                                   | 3,751,739                              | 3,628                                               |
| Central Provinces            | ... | ... | ... | 8                                   | 23,021,000                             | 19,020                                              |
| Hydrabad (Nizam's Territory) | ... | ... | ... | 5                                   | 8,683,000                              | 3,841                                               |
| Central India                | ... | ... | ... | 12                                  | 22,970,703                             | 15,608                                              |
| Bengal Presidency            | ... | ... | ... | 15                                  | 20,850,485                             | 13,735                                              |
| Punjab                       | ... | ... | ... | 9                                   | 3,373,200                              | 6,627                                               |
| U. P. of Agra & Oudh         | ... | ... | ... | 24                                  | 43,356,092                             | 23,998                                              |
| Madras Presidency            | ... | ... | ... | 24                                  | 28,370,104                             | 31,098                                              |
| Mysore                       | ... | ... | ... | 5                                   | 8,431,191                              | 7,013                                               |
| Pondicherry                  | ... | ... | ... | 3                                   | 5,765,233                              | 5,471                                               |
| Burma                        | ... | ... | ... | 1                                   | 1,086,090                              | (Closed since<br>beginning<br>of<br>1927.)          |
| Total                        |     |     |     | 326                                 | 414,039,861                            | 346,895                                             |
| Ceylon                       | ... | ... | ... | 1                                   | 1,195,125                              | 1,199                                               |

## DOCKS.

Dock labour in India is mostly casual and is paid through those who recruit this labour generally on the piece-rate basis according to the tonnage loaded, or else it may be at a daily or monthly rate. Usually the work is given over to one or more contractors, who maintain gangs of men for this work. Here again the jobber makes his appearance and although it is stated that authorities keep a check over the jobber, yet deductions by the jobber from the wages due to dock workers, are a common feature.

Unemployment is naturally rampant amongst dock labourers in all the principal ports of India, *viz.*, Calcutta, Rangoon, Madras, Karachi and Bombay.

The number of hours the workers have to put in usually range up to 12 a day. Night-shift workers put in usually 11½ hours without a break, although the day-shift workers are supposed to be allowed an hour's rest during the shift. Although this is true generally, yet in Bombay, presumably because of strong working class organization, the day-shift is of 9 hours and the night-shift of 8 hours.

In spite of rules framed by the Local Governments under the Indian Ports Act, 1908, prohibiting the employment of children under the age of 12, at Karachi I discovered numbers of children under 12 employed in coaling ships. The stevedore, who was responsible for such employment, was asked, as to whether there was any possibility of judging the age of such children. He quite frankly admitted that there was no such possibility. Recently the Government of India has passed a measure prohibiting the employment of children under 12, as there was a doubt in regard to the legality and the effective validity of the rules referred to by me. Nevertheless, it is one thing to have a legal provision: it is quite a different thing to enforce such a provision, and where it has been impossible to provide for regular machinery for the purpose of discovering the ages of children who are engaged on loading and unloading ships, there can be no possibility of effectively enforcing the law.

**No contact  
between employer  
and worker**

One fact is absolutely clear that the Port Trust authorities have no direct dealings with the workers. They deal only with the recruiters with whom they enter into a contract.

Early in the morning at about 6-30 dock workers assemble at the depot and they learn each day the number of men, who would be required to do the

day's work. When those who are chosen are taken on, the rest either hang about the place in the hope of additional work being available, or else wander back to their Bustees.

When a vessel is delayed in entering the dock, it means a loss of a day's wages to the men and no compensation is paid to them in spite of their being on call.

What was true at the time when Mr. Burnett-Hurst wrote his book on *Bombay Labour and Housing in Bombay* in regard to there being no large surplus labour available at the docks, is no longer true to-day.

One feature of work, in the Docks in India, is employment not only of children, but of woman labour, whose wages are about eight annas a day. Wages of children employed range up to seven annas a day.

Before the War, dock workers lived in boarding-house, paying for their meals and boarding Rs. 6 per month. The charges in 1919 rose to Rs. 10 and Rs. 12 per month.

Belongings possessed by the dock workers usually consist of a dish, an earthen water-pot, a red turban, a cotton jacket or two, a dhoti or two, a mat on which he sleeps and a goat's rug. It is stated that 10% of the dock labourers are homeless.\*

#### **A Tale of Poverty.**

The food eaten by dock labourers consists usually of bread made out of coarse grain, and adulterated milk sweetened with unrefined sugar. This is the morning meal. The mid-day meal consists of the same bread eaten with chillies or a raw onion. The evening meal consists of rice with pulse and chutney.

Most of the men are in debt and yet it is on record that this class of worker is unlike dock labourers in other parts of the world and is not "the sink pot of all the failures of industries" but consists of highly respected and admired workmen.

How grave is the condition of the ill-paid workers is evident from the statement made by the employers' representative that "fines are fixed by the regulations for maintaining discipline," it being a fact that there is no check on the arbitrary character of the dealings of employers with dock workers.

#### **Fines**

This is the scale on which fines are fixed :—†

|                                      |     |     |             |
|--------------------------------------|-----|-----|-------------|
| Not being on board at the time fixed | ... | ... | 2 days' pay |
|--------------------------------------|-----|-----|-------------|

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\*Burnett-Hurst, *Labour and Housing in Bombay*, Page 81.

†R. C. on Labour in India, Vol. 1, Part 2, Page 213.

|                                                   |     |     |     |             |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-------------|
| Failure to return to duty within the day on which |     |     |     | •           |
| leave expires                                     | ... | ... | ... | 1 day's pay |
| Drunkenness (first offence)                       | ... | ... | ... | 1 day's pay |
| „ (second offence)                                | ... | ... | ... | 2 days' pay |
| Disobedience of lawful commands                   | ... | ... | ... | 2 days' pay |
| Sleeping or negligent while on the lookout        | ... | ... | ... | 7 days' pay |

## SEAMEN.

The seamen of India are a world in themselves. Whenever they migrate to the great ports of Bombay or Calcutta, they usually do not bring their womenfolk with them but live a migratory life in their clubs or lodging houses. The reason for this is that employment is exceedingly uncertain and thousands have to wait their turn before they can get a job--sometimes for months and some times even for years. It was very difficult to organise the seamen in India into their various trade unions, owing to the fact that many of them were illiterate and scattered all over the cities, with no particular point of unity amongst them. However, the impossible has been achieved and strong unions of seamen have sprung up both in Bombay and in Calcutta.

When these seamen, in Bombay, for instance, live in their clubs, the usual charges are Re. 1-4 to Rs. 2 for rent per month, and if they board at these clubs, then for two meals a day, the monthly charges are Rs. 7, which sum provides an exceedingly inadequate diet.

Indian seamen are universally in debt, in spite of the fact that they are a very thrifty people. An enquiry was instituted in 1927, into the conditions of their life and work in Bombay and it was discovered that large numbers of these seamen were unemployed. The investigator came across, what he calls, a very sad case of unemployment at one of the clubs. A man about 30 years old with a wife and three children had been without employment for two years. Before this he had some ornaments belonging to his wife and some gold in the form of rings on his person, besides a watch with gold chain, and good clothes, which he had to part with. Now, his dues amounted to Rs. 500 and he had to pay interest at the rate of 72 and 108 per cent. "When I saw him he was down and out. He had no clothes except the rags which he was wearing. He shed tears while describing his condition, and those who were present in the club bore testimony to what he stated."\* This indeed is not an isolated case.

Bribery is rampant amongst these seamen, because in order to get a job somebody must be bribed. Sometimes as much much as a sum of Rs. 100 has to be paid to the brokers' men by a seaman before he can get a job. Among the Konkani seamen, out of 37 examined by this investigator, only 8 were found to be free from debts and these were from amongst those recently discharged. A cold trimmer, whose wages were Rs. 21 p. m. had to pay Rs. 10 to a Ghat Serang as a bribe besides Rs. 6 for his service sheet (Nali). Another Serang

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\*Social Service League Pamphlet, 1928, Seamen in Bombay, Page 8.

stated that each time he got employment he had to pay Rs. 10 to the broker, Rs. 5 each to the four clerks in the office and Rs. 200 to the Chief Engineer of the ship, and, he added, that he recovered this amount from the crew under him.\*

This investigator added :—

“I was reluctant to believe that so many officers and engineers took bribes and was surprised to find it true.”†

For these evils he blamed the broker system, under which brokers are engaged for the purpose of recruiting labour for the ships.

On the 26th September 1921, the Legislative Assembly adopted the following resolution :—

“ This Assembly recommends to the Governor-General-in-Council that the draft convention for establishing facilities for finding employment for seamen adopted by the General Conference of the International Labour Organisation of the League of Nations convened at Geneva on the 15th day of June 1920 should not be ratified but that examination should be undertaken without delay of the methods of recruitment of seamen at different ports in India in order that it may be definitely ascertained whether those abuses are susceptible to remedy.”

The Government appointed a Committee in consequence of this Resolution, known as the Seamen's Recruitment Committee. The facts elicited were remarkable. It was admitted that in Bombay bribery was serious and that in Calcutta, as far as the deck and engine room crews were concerned, it took the form of systematized extortion ; that serious unemployment existed among seamen, and that the chief and immediate cause of this state of affairs was the presence of interested intermediaries who come between the ship-owners and the seamen, *viz*, the brokers and the Ghat Serangs who influence the selection of seamen. This system of recruitment of seamen has been in existence for well-nigh 70 years and is a lucrative business for all those who are in charge of it. Many remedies were suggested, including the dismissal of the Ghat Serangs and the Ghat Pedaller, the dispensing with of the services of the licensed brokers, the setting-up of some sort of an Employment Bureau, the two alternative systems being, as suggested in the Geneva Labour Conference Convention 1920, namely employment officers organised and maintained by representative associations of ship-owners and seamen in co-operation, or a state employment bureau.

There are no legislative prohibitions in regard to the hours of work and overtime put in by seamen. There is, therefore, no standard time table in force but the hours of work are generally as follows:—

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\*Ibid P. 14-15.

†Ibid P. 20.

**Deck Hands:**—At sea, from about 5-30 a. m. or 6 a. m. to 5 p. m. or 5-30 p. m. with two intervals of one hour each for meals and one hour's duty on look-out. Shorter hours are worked on Saturdays and Sundays. On Saturdays from 5-30 a. m. or 6 a. m. to 2 p. m. or 1 p. m. with one hour off for meals, and on Sundays from 5-30 or 6 a. m. to 9 a. m. In port from 6 a. m. to 5-30 p. m. with the same intervals for meals and shorter hours as above on Saturdays and Sundays.

**Engine Room Crew:**—At sea the crew is divided into batches. Each batch is 4 hours on duty and 8 hours off duty. In port the hours of duty are from 7 a.m. to 5 p. m. with intervals for meals as above. Shorter hours are worked on Saturdays 7 a. m. to 2 p. m. with one hour off and no work is done on Sundays except what is necessary to maintain lighting and sanitary services.

**Saloon Crew:**—The duties performed by this section of the crew are so various that any general statement regarding hours of work would be misleading. Broadly speaking, men are required to be on duty during service hours which vary with the class of employment and the rating of the individual.

The men are also liable to be called out at any time in case of emergency.

Wages are not fixed by agreement, but the wages paid are entered on the Articles of Agreement under which the seamen are signed on. The present Bombay rates of wages \* were fixed by the Liners' Conference and were standardized, except the wages paid by the P. & O. Steamship Company, but generally they vary for different ports and on different lines. Here is a list of some of the prevailing rates of wages:—

## WAGES.

### DECK STAFF.

| RATINGS.    | PASSENGER STEAMER. |    |    |   |        |   | CARGO LINE.        |
|-------------|--------------------|----|----|---|--------|---|--------------------|
|             | (per month)        |    |    |   |        |   | (per month)        |
|             | Rs. a.             |    | p. |   | Rs. a. |   | p.                 |
| Deck Serang | ...                | 60 | 0  | 0 | 50     | 0 | 0 (Coastal vessel) |
| Seacunney   | ...                | 55 | 0  | 0 | 45     | 0 | 0 ( „ )            |
| Tindal      | ...                | 37 | 0  | 0 |        |   |                    |
| 2nd Tindal  | ...                | 30 | 0  | 0 |        |   |                    |
| Cassab      | ...                | 30 | 0  | 0 |        |   |                    |
| Winchman    | ...                | 28 | 0  | 0 |        |   |                    |
| Lascars     | ...                | 18 | 0  | 0 | 25     | 0 | 0                  |
| Bhandari    | ...                | 25 | 0  | 0 |        |   |                    |
| Topaz       | ...                | 22 | 0  | 0 |        |   |                    |

\* Memorandum Government of India Department of Commerce re : Seamen.

## ENGINE ROOM STAFF.

CARGO LINE.  
(per month)

|               | Rs.    | a. | p. |
|---------------|--------|----|----|
| Engine Serang | ... 60 | 0  | 0  |
| 1st Tindal    | ... 35 | 0  | 0  |
| 2nd Tindal    | ... 30 | 0  | 0  |
| 3rd Tindal    | ... 28 | 0  | 0  |
| Cassab        | ... 28 | 0  | 0  |
| Donkeyman     | ... 28 | 0  | 0  |
| Oilman        | ... 26 | 0  | 0  |
| Fireman       | ... 23 | 0  | 0  |
| Trimmer       | ... 18 | 0  | 0  |
| Bhandari      | ... 25 | 0  | 0  |
| Topaz         | ... 22 | 0  | 0  |

## SALOON DEPARTMENT.

|                      |        |   |               |        |        |
|----------------------|--------|---|---------------|--------|--------|
| Butler-in-Charge     | ... 80 | 0 | 0             |        |        |
| Butler under Steward | ... 75 | 0 | 0             |        |        |
| 2nd Butler           | ... 40 | 0 | 0 to 50       | 0      | 0      |
| Baker mate           | ... 30 | 0 | 0             |        |        |
| Baker                | ... 70 | 0 | 0             |        |        |
| Chief cook           | ... 70 | 0 | 0             |        |        |
| 2nd cook             | ... 40 | 0 | 0             |        |        |
| 3rd cook             | ... 25 | 0 | 0             |        |        |
| 4th cook             | ... 20 | 0 | 0             |        |        |
| Chief Cook & Butler  | ... 75 | 0 | 0             | 75     | 0 0    |
| Saloon Boy           | ... 32 | 0 | 0 B.I. Rs. 33 | 0 0    | 35 0 0 |
| Half saloon boy      | ... 15 | 0 | 0             |        |        |
| Captain's boy        | ... 32 | 0 | 0 B.I. Rs. 30 | 0 0    | 35 0 0 |
| Chief Engineer's boy | ... 32 | 0 | 0             | 30 0 0 | 35 0 0 |
| Officer's boy        | ... 32 | 0 | 0             | 30 0 0 | 35 0 0 |
| Marconi boy          | ... 30 | 0 | 0             |        |        |
| Mess Room boy        | ... 38 | 0 | 0             |        |        |
| Mess Room Mate       | ... 16 | 0 | 0             |        |        |
| Butcher              | ... 45 | 0 | 0 to 50       | 0 0    |        |
| Butcher's Mate       | ... 25 | 0 | 0             |        |        |
| Scullion             | ... 24 | 0 | 0             |        |        |
| Topaz                | ... 22 | 0 | 0             |        |        |
| Pantryman 1st Class  | ... 40 | 0 | 0             | 37     | 0 0    |
| Pantryman 2nd class  | ... 35 | 0 | 0             |        |        |
| Pantry Mate          | ... 20 | 0 | 0             |        |        |

In order to lower the wages of seamen some companies bring men from Calcutta, where wages are lower, to Bombay, thereby creating competition between Bombay seamen and Calcutta seamen.

When the conditions of life and labour of seamen were discussed at the International Seamen's Conference held at Geneva in 1920 **Race & Wages** Mr. Cuthbert Laws who represented the British vested interests was opposed to the view of the French, Italian and Dutch delegates, who insisted on there being no differentiation made on the basis of nationality, race or religion in the treatment of seamen. They further insisted that no rule should be adopted "which might create economic competition between European and Indian seamen." But Mr. Cuthbert Laws pretended that he had the Indian seamen's interests at heart and according to a report that was published he "emphasized the difference between Lascars and Europeans." He proceeded to assert that it was unjust to the Lascars to place them on a level of equality with European seamen. I do not know if he was told that the fictitious barriers of race prejudice created by a set of exploiting individuals or a class of industrial magnates in order to further their own designs, are no barriers at all when the exploited of one country meet the exploited of another at a common platform claiming common rights as wronged and suffering human beings.

In fact so pitiable is the condition of Indian seamen that it is reported, in the Deck Department, 80 per cent. of the Lascars are in debt and that the average extent of indebtedness is Rs. 25. In the engine room, 75 per cent. are in debt, the average extent being Rs. 30. In the Saloon Department, 75 per cent. are in debt, with limits varying from Rs. 20 to Rs. 50, the average being Rs. 35. The average rate of interest is 75 to 150 per cent. These figures relate to Calcutta.

According to the Memorandum of the Indian Seamen's Union, Indian seamen number 2,50,000, while the number employed by shipping companies at any one time is only 50,000, which leaves, according to this figure, about two hundred thousand unemployed.

Sir Geoffery Corbett, Government delegate for India, in the last Maritime Session of the International Labour Conference, stated that Indian seamen are physically weak and that one white seaman is equal to two Indians. This is a point which is easy of dispute. Nevertheless, the wages of an English seaman are £. 9-10 whereas the wages of an Indian seaman are Rs. 23 or £. 1-15. The Memorandum of the Indian Seamen's Union adds: "If, therefore, two Indian seamen are employed in place of one white seaman, it would appear that even so they receive only £. 3-10 as compared with £. 9-10." This is the position so far as Indian Seamen are concerned they

are exploited by ship-owners in every possible way.

Mr. J. Henson of the Marine Section of the Transport and General Workers' Union stated in the "Daily Herald" of 17th December 1929, that the average wage paid to Indian seamen is thirty-two shillings a month, which is just over one shilling a day, and the hours of work are from sunrise to sunset, and he suggests that if the P. & O. Company had led the way in paying Indian seamen the same wage as paid to the Europeans, the accumulated assets and dividends, which amount to forty million pounds net, might not have been so large. I give here a comparative statement of the wage position:—

#### INDIAN SEAMEN VERSUS BRITISH SEAMEN

|                           |     |     |     | £. | s. | p. |
|---------------------------|-----|-----|-----|----|----|----|
| Sailor British            | ... | —   | —   | 9  | 0  | 0  |
| „ Bombay Lascar           | ... | ... | ... | 2  | 6  | 6  |
| „ Calcutta                | ... | ... | ... | 1  | 17 | 6  |
| „ Chinaman                | ... | ... | ... | 3  | 5  | 4  |
| Greaser British           | ... | ... | ... | 10 | 0  | 0  |
| „ Bombay Lascar           | ... | ... | ... | 2  | 19 | 3  |
| „ Calcutta                | ... | ... | ... | 1  | 19 | 0  |
| „ Chinaman                | ... | ... | ... | 3  | 19 | 4  |
| Fireman British           | ... | ... | ... | 9  | 10 | 0  |
| „ Bombay Lascar           | ... | ... | ... | 2  | 2  | 9  |
| „ Calcutta                | ... | ... | ... | 1  | 14 | 6  |
| „ Chinaman                | ... | ... | ... | 3  | 16 | 2  |
| Assistant Steward British | ... | ... | ... | 8  | 5  | 0  |
| „ „ Bombay Lascar         | ... | ... | ... | 3  | 3  | 0  |
| „ „ Calcutta              | ... | ... | ... | 2  | 11 | 0  |
| „ „ Chinaman              | ... | ... | ... | 3  | 5  | 4  |

As a matter of fact, Indian seamen are better able to stand the tropical climate than white seamen. a fact admitted by the national organ of the National Union of Seamen, Great Britain and Ireland. The real reason for the recruitment of the Indian seaman is his cheapness. Mr. Henson says:—

“The real reason the Indian seaman is carried is because he can be obtained at a lower rate. His living accommodation on board the ship is less, and in case of death, his compensation, if any, is only a small amount. If claims are made and disputes arise, well, the claimants are in India and the owners are in Great Britain.”

The existing rates of wages do not provide a living wage for Indian seamen, who are thus exploited by foreign companies to the great detriment not only of themselves but of those foreign workers who desire to better their own conditions, but are tied down to the low conditions applicable to Indian seamen whose competition they have to face.

# INLAND STEAM NAVIGATION

Inland Steam Navigation has had an interesting history, but to-day it is mainly confined to the Brahmaputra and the lower reaches of the Ganges and the Irrawaddy as also to the canals and tributaries of these rivers. Practically the entire business is concentrated in the hands of two companies : the River Steam Navigation Co. Ltd., which is a private limited concern and, therefore, does not publish its accounts; and the India General Navigation and Ry. Co. Ltd., The strength of the fleet of these two companies is approximately the same. On the 31st of December, 1927, the I. G. N. and Ry. Co. Ltd., had on commission 151 steamers, 1153 flats and 207 cargo boats, 29 barges and 46 receiving flats, a total of 577. The profit of this company for that year was £ 32,000. In 1928 the profit was £ 24,000. A dividend of 8 per cent. was declared in 1927. The block account including stores, amounted to £ 895,025 and £ 85,000 was transferred to the General Reserve. These two Companies monopolise all the navigation in the district through which they operate. Their employment lists shew that they engaged at a time 1350 Masters and Drivers and about 25,000 crew, which number includes workshop employees at different centres. For several years the steamers of these companies were in the charge of European Commanders and Engineers and Indian crew. In the beginning of this century European Commanders were replaced by Indian Masters and Drivers at very low rates of wages; who, it is stated, were given on the whole, 1/6th of the wages paid to Europeans. Moreover, these Masters and Drivers were called upon to recruit the crew for the various steamers under their charge, thereby completely divorcing the responsibility of the Company towards their employees. The wages paid to the crew were very low. There was no proper accommodation on board the steamers; there was no medical relief available for the men and there was no limit to the hours of duty. No registers of the crew recruited by the masters and drivers were kept by the companies.

As a result of the formation of a Union of the workers, known as the Bengal Mariners' Union, certain grievances were redressed by the companies in the matter of wages, claims, restoration of retrenched hands, introduction of a grading system of pay for masters and drivers. In the matter of recruitment, transfer, promotion of serangs, drivers and the crew, grave abuses exist, which are not unknown in other branches of industry in India, viz, the necessity for a worker to bribe the man incharge before he can obtain employment.

## SCALE OF WORK.

The following are the scales of wages :—

## GRADE I.

*Masters in Charge* holding 2nd Class Certificates or Licenses, from Rs. 65 to Rs. 200 per month (maximum).

*Drivers in Charge* holding 1st Class Certificates or Licenses, from Rs. 61 to Rs. 190 per month (maximum).

## GRADE II.

*2nd Serangs and Launch Serangs* holding 2nd class Certificates only, from Rs. 52 to Rs. 60 (maximum).

*2nd Drivers* holding 1st Class Certificates only, from Rs. 50 to Rs. 58 (maximum).

## GRADE III.

*All Serangs* holding 3rd Class Certificates, from Rs. 46 to Rs. 60 (maximum).

*Drivers* holding 2nd Class Certificates only, from Rs. 46 to Rs. 58 (maximum).

## GRADE IV.

*Flat Serangs* from Rs. 32 to Rs. 50 (maximum).

Scale of wages of the crew under the Joint Steamer Companies :—

## I. G. N. &amp; Ry. COMPANY.

## Deck Crew.

|                |                        |
|----------------|------------------------|
| Tindal         | ... Rs. 28 and 31 p.m. |
| Head Sucani    | ... „ 29 „             |
| Ord. Sucani    | ... „ 26 „             |
| Kussub         | ... „ 21 „             |
| Lascar         | ... „ 20 „             |
| Topaz          | ... „ 20 „             |
| Bhandari       | ... „ 20 „             |
| Manifest Clerk | ... „ 27 & 33 „        |

## Engine-Room Crew.

|              |                    |
|--------------|--------------------|
| Tindal       | ... „ 27 & 31 p.m. |
| Kussub       | ... „ 27           |
| Fireman      | ... „ 23 & 27      |
| Coal Trimmer | ... „ 20           |
| Bhandari     | ... „ 20           |

## R. S. N. COMPANY.

## All Steamers Direct, Despatch Feeders.

|          |                      |
|----------|----------------------|
| Tindal   | 2 grades Rs. 28 & 31 |
| Sucani   | 2 „ „ 26 & 29        |
| Cassab   | 1 „ „ 21             |
| Lascar   | 1 „ „ 20             |
| Bhandari | 1 „ „ 20             |
| Topaz    | 1 „ „ 20             |

## Running and Receiving Flats.

|        |                      |
|--------|----------------------|
| Sucani | 2 grades Rs. 26 & 29 |
| Lascar | 1 „ „ 20             |

## Launches.

|        |                |
|--------|----------------|
| Lascar | 1 grade Rs. 20 |
|--------|----------------|

## Engine-Room.

|          |                      |
|----------|----------------------|
| Tindal   | 2 grades Rs. 27 & 31 |
| Winchman | 1 „ „ 27             |
| Fireman  | 2 „ „ 23 & 27        |

|              |            |
|--------------|------------|
| Lightman     | ... Rs. 31 |
| 2nd Lightman | ... „ 25   |
| Greaser      | ... „ 27   |
| Waterman     | ... „ 25   |

## Pilots.

|                   |            |
|-------------------|------------|
| On Hooghly Point; |            |
| No. 1 Inspector   | ... Rs. 27 |
| No. 2 „           | ... „ 21   |
| Arkathi           | ... „ 17   |
| Khalasi           | ... „ 15.  |

## On other lines :

|               |          |
|---------------|----------|
| Inspector     | ... „ 21 |
| Arkathi No. 1 | ... „ 15 |
| „ No. 2       | ... „ 13 |
| Boat-manji    | ... „ 12 |
| Lightman      | ... „ 11 |

*The Calcutta Corporation**Water-Boat Employees.*

|                   |                   |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| Gunner            | ... Rs. 100-5-150 |
| do                | ... „ 80-4-100    |
| Serang            | ... „ 50-3-65     |
| Asst. Driver      | ... „ 40-2-50     |
| Driver of a Barge | ... „ 40-2-50     |
| Sucani            | ... „ 27          |
| Lascar            | ... „ 16          |
| Bhandari          | ... „ 16          |
| Tindal            | ... „ 26          |
| Fireman           | ... „ 20          |
| Coal-Trimmer      | ... „ 16          |
| Barge Manji...    | ... „ 14, 16      |
| „ Dandee          | ... „ 12          |
| Jeti Tindal       | ... „ 17          |
| „ Khalasi         | ... „ 13          |

*Sonakands Building Company.*

|                   |              |
|-------------------|--------------|
| Serang and Driver | „ 30, 45, 55 |
| Khalasi           | ... „ 18     |
| Fireman           | ... „ 22     |

|          |         |        |
|----------|---------|--------|
| Cassab   | 1 Grade | Rs. 27 |
| Greaser  | 1 „ „   | 27     |
| Trimmer  | 1 „ „   | 20     |
| Bhandari | 1 „ „   | 20     |

## Barges.

|                |          |
|----------------|----------|
| I. G. N. Manji | „ 16, 26 |
| Khalasi        | „ 12, 20 |
| R. S. N. Manji | „ 16, 23 |
| Khalasi        | „ 12, 16 |

## Saloon Depot.

|               |        |
|---------------|--------|
| Butler        | Rs. 25 |
| Cook          | „ 20   |
| K. T. Servant | „ 10   |
| Mussalachi.   | „ 8    |

*R. Sim & Co. Co-operative Societies Co.  
London, Clerk & Co., Gardin & Co. etc.*

|         |            |
|---------|------------|
| Serang  | Rs. 25, 48 |
| Driver  | „ 25, 42   |
| Khalasi | „ 17       |
| Fireman | „ 21       |

*The E. B. R. & S. Co.*

|              |                     |
|--------------|---------------------|
| 1st Serang   | Rs. 50, 52, 53, 64. |
| 2nd Serang,  | „ 35, 40            |
| 1st Driver   | „ 40, 52, 56.       |
| 2nd „        | „ 35, 40.           |
| Sukhani      | „ 24                |
| Tindal       | „ 24                |
| Fireman      | „ 21                |
| Coal Trimmer | „ 16                |
| Khalasi      | „ 16                |
| Bhandari     | „ 16                |

# SILVER

The most important silver mine, is the Bawdwin mine, owned by the Burma Corporation. This mine is supposed to be, with one exception, the largest individual silver, lead and zinc deposit

## Autocracy

within the British Empire. It is stated that no other mine with large deposits contains ores of such high average grade. The production, from 1919 to 1930, of silver has gone up from over 2 million ounces to over 7 million ounces a year, whereas the production of lead went up from less than 20,000 tons to 80,000 tons and of zinc from over 10,000 tons in 1924 to over 60,000 tons in 1930. The total number of employees is about 15,000. Indigenous labour is not available for working the mines. Indian Provinces and the Chinese Provinces of Yunan provide the labour forces at these mines in Bawdwin and Namtu. In this settlement access is not easy without the assistance of the Management and residence therein is difficult without its consent, with the result that control of the employers over the life and labour of workers is comprehensive. \* The Burma Corporation was regarded by the Royal Commission on Labour, in its dealings with this settlement, as an enterprise more autocratic than anything seen by the Commission elsewhere in India and it was doubted whether anything of the kind would be possible today in industry in any Indian province. But it must be remembered that the Burma Corporation thrives upon the autocratic methods it exercises over the life and labour of the workers employed by it.

# MICA.

It has been estimated that the proportion of workers in this industry is as follows :—

|          |     |               |
|----------|-----|---------------|
| Men      | ..  | 56 per cent.  |
| Women    | ... | 17 per cent.  |
| Children | ..  | 27 per cent.* |

A young child working in this industry generally is not a separately paid worker. "It comes with its mother, sits with her and may or may not help her".

In Bihar and Orissa alone, over 11,395 workers are employed normally in the Mica factories, and twice as home workers.

Mica is prepared through the processes of sickle cutting, knife dressing, sizing, sorting, splitting and packing.

It is needless to add that this industry thrives upon the labour of young children. Payment is made to the workers either on the time basis or on the piece work system. Usually the woman being paid on the piece work basis and men on a time basis. The wages paid to women range from about 4 or 5 annas a day and to men from about 6 to 7 annas a day.†

It has been stated by the General Manager of a big concern—the Kodorma Mica Mining Association that, in this industry, there are two thousand traders to every thirty miners,‡ meaning obviously that there are two thousand middlemen to every thirty miners. This gentleman justified the employment of children on the following grounds :—

When asked whether it was a matter of his "kindness" to the families or an economic proposition to employ children, he said. "It is not an economic proposition to employ them, but they are in the charge of their friends and relatives, they are in a nice, dry place and out of the sun, and if they can make a few annas for themselves, so much the better; they will probably cry if we send them away." §

When in the case of the Kodorma mine, women were excluded from it, the employers said that the cost of production had gone up by nearly 50 per cent. By this they meant that they had to employ men and pay six to seven annas a day to them, whereas they paid four annas a day or less to them.

Here is a boy—Etyari Kamdoo—who is a boy mica cutter and who star-

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\*Supplementary Memorandum of the Government of Bihar and Orissa, Page 5.

†Evidence before R. C. on Labour Vol. IV, Part II, Page 89.

‡Ibid P. 84.

§Ibid P. 88.

ted work at the age of seven. He puts in usually six days a week, and the average wages paid to him are about Rs. 1-9-0 (or 2s. 3d.)\*

Another boy of 12, Karim Miah, a boy mica splitter, put in five day's work and earned the handsome sum of fourteen annas and nine pies.†

Akli Ghatwalan, a girl worker at the Local Factory, put in six years of work and was considered to be no more than 15 years of age. She put in 6 days' work in the week, walked two miles from her little home to the factory and earned the sum of fourteen annas and six pies for a six-day week, or for little over two pence a day.

Mica mines are found in Bihar and Madras usually far away from the ordinary habitation of man. Rajputana is developing as great potential centre of Mica production.

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\* Ibid, F. 81.

† Ibid, P 80.

# SHELLAC

**Disgusting Condi-  
tions** In Bihar there are about 127 Shellac factories, employing over four thousand workers. In the Central Provinces there are 22 factories employing about 2,000 workers. A weekly holiday is virtually unknown in these factories (unregistered).

The hours of work for children employed in the factories are the same as those for men and women. † It is stated that the work is so arduous in these factories that even an adult feels great exhaustion at the end of the day, and that debilitation is experienced after three or four months of regular work. The floors of these so-called factories are of mud and the roofs are constantly leaking. There is hardly any drainage system. The Director of Public Health in the Central Provinces states as a result of a recent investigation. —

“Washing pits, reservoirs and drains are not properly cleaned at regular intervals. The same water is used for washing over and over again for a week or more and is allowed to stagnate for a period before it is drained off. Due to putrefaction of all the animal refuse from the stick lac, along with myriads of crushed insects in this water, the stinking effluvia from washing basins and drains are disgusting. But the persons employed on washing have to stand knee-deep in this water in the pits and carry on the work for hours together.’ ‡

Thirty percent. of the labour force consists of women. A large number of children of tender ages are employed in twisting bags and in drying lac; 10 % of the entire labour force consists of these boys of tender ages, who have to work in the stove rooms in excessive heat.

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\*Supplementary Memorandum of the Government of Bihar & Orissa  
Page 8.

†Ibid, P. 9.

‡Report of the Royal Commission on Labour Page, 95.

# MANGANESE

In the Kandri mine, Nagpur District, one gang of four workers, working for six days, earned the sum of Rs. 6-4 for the week.\*

The contractor's agent at this mine was asked whether there was any difficulty in the men getting away from that place, because of  
**Bonded Slaves** the advances that may be given to them on their employment. He replied that he had no power to prevent their going away † He was asked whether he got a bond signed by the worker when money was advanced to him. He gave a simple reply and said that he got a receipt from him. The "receipt" states:—

" I have borrowed Rs. 20/- and I will, by working in the Manganese mine, pay back this advance ; I will work in this mine and in any other mine to which you may transfer me. *I agree to accept any rate that may be prevailing in your mine*, and for whatever I pay back towards the advance, I shall get a receipt from you. If I pay back any money without taking a receipt and I say I have paid back that money, that will not be true. I also agree that from the date of taking this advance, I will work for at least one year in your mine ; if there is any money left over after the year not paid back towards the advance, then I shall work until it is paid back. I have signed this receipt fully conscious of what I am signing in the presence of witnesses." ‡

The reader will note that this " receipt " is really a bond of slavery.

These workers have their first meal at 9 in the morning; at 12 their wives bring them food, which they eat at 2 o'clock and at 8 or 9  
**Living Conditions** at night they have their dinner. The morning meal consists of rice, and whatever is left over of the rice is eaten at 2 o'clock. At night again they eat rice with pulse or potatoes, sometimes a cauliflower or some other vegetable.§

When these workers fall ill, they say that they take an advance from the contractor's Manager without interest, which advance is deducted from their wages.

A woman worker Chhoti said that she and another woman between them, earned three rupees a week, and that she had five boys to keep, three of whom

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\*Evidence before the Royal Commission on Labour, Vol. III, Part II, P. 62.

†Ibid P. 62-63.

‡Ibid P. 63.

§Ibid P. 65.

were living with her. Her usual work was breaking stones and loading trucks.\*

In the Central Provinces there are 260 Manganese mines including a few limestone and other quarries employing on an average 38,300 employees.† The first prospecting license for Manganese was granted in 1899 and today nearly 87% of the entire produce of Manganese in India comes from these mines in the Central Provinces. It is reported that the principal causes of migration of workers engaged in this industry and allied industries are famine and scarcity, unemployment, either permanent or temporary, the disappearance of hereditary occupations or cottage industries, the prospect of higher wages in urban areas, and inability of hereditary occupations to absorb an increasing population.

It is stated that English Boards of Directors predominate in the Manganese Industry, owning the most important deposits and working the bigger mines. 85% of the workers provide their own housing in the Central Provinces and in mining areas the huts built for or by the workers are generally of wattle and thatching, the door being so low that the inmates generally cannot pass upright through it. Leaking roofs and damp floor are common during the rains.‡

**Leaking roofs and  
damp floor**

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\*Ibid P. 69.

†R. C. on Labour Vol. III, Pt. 1, p. 3

‡Ibid, p. 14.

# SALT

Salt except in the Kohat Mine Division, where it is the property of local quarry owners, is controlled by the Government of India whose main function is to see that Excise Duty is collected.

## System

For this purpose a Department, known as the Northern India Salt Revenue Department, has been created. It deals with the Salt Range Division in the Punjab and the Rajputana Salt Source Division. In the latter division there are three sources of salt production, *viz.*, Sambhar, Didwana and Pachpatra.

In the last-mentioned two areas, the owners of the pits supply the Government with salt as the vendors and also supply the labour, their families usually being the employees.

In the Sambhar Lake area which is within the jurisdiction of Jodhpur and Jaipur States, the Government of India have leased the properties, which produce 73,00,000 of maunds of salt a year. The work of extraction is on contract basis. Generally in the lake area a Co-operative Society recruits the labour from 12 neighbouring villages, although there is a private firm which also recruits labour from the adjoining area. Here again, the system of employing labour through jobbers is in force. The workers are given advances by the contractors, which are deducted from their wages.

During the extraction season the workers are housed in what the Government of India, through the Department concerned, euphemistically describe as "grass shelters," although two barracks have been erected in the lake area, which again the Government of India describe as "model," by which they mean rooms of 12' x 12.' Malaria is widely prevalent.\*

The Punjab Salt Range contains the richest deposits of rock-salt in the world. The right to levy a tax on the sale of salt is an ancient prerogative of the State.

During the pre-British period, salt was mined by the proprietors and sold to the Government at Re. 1 for every 20 maunds and sold by the Government to the people at Rs. 2 per maund.

The ancient description of the miners that of Dr. Andrew Fleming, 1848, says: "The dress of the miners is of the lightest description, the men wearing nothing but a bit of cloth round their loins and a pad of *namda* or thick woollen cloth tied over their shins to protect them from injuries from the sharp angles of rock or the blows of their instruments."

From age to age  
the same

This description is as true today as it was nearly a hundred years ago.

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\*Memorandum, Northern India Salt Revenue Department, Page 3.

Workers employed on extraction doing a full day's work are stated by the memorandum of the Department to be able to earn ten annas a day. The actual wording is : " they can earn ten annas a day for a full day's work." Needless to say that they do not get this amount in this seasonal occupation.

Three mines are worked by the Department at Khewra, Warcha and Kalabagh in the Punjab Salt Range Division. Here it was that we came across employment of forced labour. Criminals who are ticket-of-leave men are employed by the Department on loading trucks in the Depot along with hereditary miners—miners to whom originally the salt range belonged. The total labour force at Khewra is 1100, at Warcha 250 and at Kalabagh 200. A great deal of unemployment exists among these miners.

Vital statistics shew that between 1926 and 1928 the number of out-patients had increased from 8,288 to 13,245 for males and from 3,663 to 6,360 for females.

A special feature of administration run amok is the system introduced by the Department of deducting one pie per rupee from the wages of the men towards a Pension Fund, but the pensions are not available to the men as a right, being dependent upon the good-will of the gangman and the headman.

A significant fact to notice is that in the schools the attendance in 1928 on the average was 240 and it is stated that this figure was composed entirely of children *not employed*.

There has been no marked fluctuation in wages since 1922. During the season it is stated--on what authority we do not know--that the average income was Rs. 39 per month per head. The increase in wages in 1922 was due to a strike which occurred in 1921 at the Khewra mine the only strike within 40 years. It is stated that the strike lasted for three months.

I was given a series of statements by the miners at Khewra which are interesting to read.

In one of them it was stated : " Since a very very long time our ancestors used to work inside the salt mines. We also had worked inside the mine for years. But now we are unemployed, as outsiders have been brought in to do our work."

Another stated ; "At the time of the strike, I was ordered to prepare Chamber No. 13. Everyone refused to work, but I obeyed the order. I spent a large sum of money in preparing the Chamber, but when it was complete, it was taken away from me and from that time till now I am out of work. I have become very poor!"

Such is the fate of black-legs!

These men, who were the owners of the mines, were promised in the fifties that they would be given a royalty up to two annas per maund of all salt extracted from the mines. Although the document guaranteeing this royalty is in the possession of the salt-miners' families, yet the promise has never been fulfilled.

In 1863 the Government enquired into this question, but did not grant proprietary rights to the miners, who had gone on strike—probably the first known strike in this area.

The ancestors of the present miners were owners of the houses occupied by them, but during the last ten years orders have been issued by the Department that no houses should be re-built or repaired without a stamped deed being executed by the owner thereof in favour of the Salt Department with the stipulation that the occupiers were liable to be ejected if they could not work satisfactorily according to the wishes of the Salt Department. The result is that the miners are more or less bonded slaves working in the mines unable to leave their jobs for fear of ejection from their houses, which would mean exile for them from their villages.

Formerly the system of payment was according to the measurement of the space worked out by the miner. Three years ago the system was changed and payment now is according to the number of trucks of salt a miner can supply during a certain period. The rate allowed is Rs. 3-6-0 per truck loaded of salt, The daily output is about 10,000 maunds of salt conveyed by 250 trucks each carrying 40 maunds. The total number of trucks supplied every month is 6,250. Each miner is given a note-book giving the number of truck at his disposal and there are 611 such miners, who have been supplied with such note-books. Therefore, taking the monthly average, each holder of such a note-book supplies roughly about 10 trucks, which at Rs. 3-6-0 a truck gives approximately the figure mentioned as the wages earned by a miner in the Government Memorandum. But what is not mentioned in that Memorandum is the expenses of gun-powder used in taking out the salt and of oil consumed, which amounts to fourteen annas per truck. When we make this deduction the total average income of a book holding miner is Rs. 25 p. m.

Now another fact has to be taken into consideration. The miner actually works for not more than 10 months in a year, the remaining two months being rainy months, when work in the mines becomes dangerous. Making allowance for this factor the average income of a book-holding miner comes down to Rs. 20-13-4 p. m.

Apart from the 613 book-holding miners the actual total number of miners working in the mines is 2,677. Thus the number of persons depending upon one book is  $4\frac{1}{3}$ . Therefore, a family of  $4\frac{1}{3}$  has to live on an average income of Rs 20-13-4 per month, whereas the total expenses, worked out by the miners themselves, of a bare subsistence diet for this family alone is Rs. 50 a month, not including annual expenses such as necessary repairs to the house, fines, pie fund, illness and other charges. According to the miners their average monthly expenses are 61-15-4 for a family of  $4\frac{1}{3}$  as against a monthly income of Rs. 20-13-4. The miners stated definitely that the account books of the money-lenders of Khewra were a living testimony of the fact that they were deeply in debt.

They suggested a way out of their difficulty by working out actual statistics on the basis that the salt dealer purchases the salt from the Government and pays 1-9-0 per maund, out of which Re. 1-4-0 goes to the Government Treasury as Salt Duty and five annas remain for expenses incurred by the Government for labour, whereas a more equitable distribution would give them a living wage.

No provision is made for old and disabled miners. In order to keep the labour permanent the Government assigned certain plots of land to miners for their maintenance. These lands were prepared at great expense and labour by the workers, but there is no security of tenure and the tenants are liable to ejection.

The miners and their petition with a statement as follows :—

We have briefly laid before you a few out of many grievances with a strong belief that you will kindly spare some of your valuable time in devising some means for the amelioration of our condition.

It may not be futile to say that our living is very wretched; our incomes too poor to maintain our families

**Wretched living** and our status much lower than that of our agricultural brotherhood in the same local-  
ity.

As compared to other countries, the conditions of labour in this country are bad and we can boldly say that our fate is the worst."

# OIL.

Petroleum is produced in three Provinces.—Burma, Assam and the Punjab, the most important of these being Burma which produces nine-tenths of the total output of the whole of India. **Those who control** The Burmese fields are in the control of the Burma Oil Company (five square miles), the British Petroleum Company (two square miles) and the Hessford Development Syndicate (one square mile). These fields, known as the Singu and the Yenangyat fields, produced nearly two million gallons in 1927. The Niembu fields produced over 5 million gallons and the Indaw fields produced nearly 2 million gallons whereas the Thayetmyo district produced about a million gallons.

The Companies engaged in the production of oil in India are :—

The Burmah Oil Co., Ltd.,

The Assam Oil Co., Ltd.,

The British Burmah Petroleum Co., Ltd.,

The Rangoon Oil Co., Ltd.,

The Indo-Burmah Petroleum Co., Ltd.,

The Hessford Development Syndicate.

The Attock Oil Co., Ltd.

The Irrawaddy Petroleum Syndicate.

The Moola Oil Co., Ltd.,

The Indo-Burmah Oilfields Ltd.,

The Thilawa Refineries (Burma), Ltd.,

The last-named Company has ceased working. The Indo-Burmah Oilfields Ltd., has been in the hands of a Receiver. The Irrawaddy **The Combine** Petroleum Syndicate and the Moola Oil Co., Ltd., are in the initial stages of operation. The Burmah Oil Company Ltd., holds 90 per cent of the share capital of the Assam Oil Co. The British Burmah Petroleum Co., utilizes the marketing organisation of the Burmah Oil Co., Ltd. The Rangoon Oil Co., Ltd., is practically identical with the British Burma Petroleum Co., Ltd., which holds 96 per cent of its shares. In fact, the share registers of these Companies disclose the fact that they are very closely associated. But, roughly, there are two groups—the Burmah Oil Company group and the Indo Burmah Petroleum Co., and the Hessford Development Syndicate group. The Attock Oil Company occupies an intermediate position. Until recently, the Asiatic Petroleum Co. (India), Ltd., was the marketing organization of the Royal Dutch Shell group of oil companies in India, not being concerned with production but only with sale. Since December 1927, this Com-

pany has been taken over by the Burmah Shell Oil Storage and Distributing Co. (India) Ltd., formed for the purpose of amalgamating the marketing organizations of the Burma Oil Co., Ltd., and the Asiatic Petroleum (India) Co., Ltd.

The Burmah Oil Co., Ltd., was reconstructed in 1902 with an original capital of £1,145,114. It had to face severe competition from the Royal Dutch Shell Group, owing to a price war which ended in 1905, when both companies came to an understanding, and indigenous companies were given the first right to the Indian market, it being understood that any deficiency in supply would be made good by the Royal Dutch Shell Group. The Standard Oil Company, because of a policy of fixing a maximum price plus the excise duty on 195,000 tons of inferior kerosene oil, was unable to compete and up to this day, the Standard Oil Co., has followed nearly the prices fixed by the Royal Dutch Shell Group and the Burma Oil Company's organization. In 1911, the Burmah Oil Company started a rate war against the Standard Oil Company. Meanwhile, its capital, with bonus and subscribed shares, had been increased to nearly £10,866,256, both ordinary and preference capital being included and half a million pounds worth of debentures were paid off. Nearly 5½ million pounds worth of capital is represented by bonus shares, and the following list gives the dividends declared by this Company up to 1927 :-

|      |     |     |     | Profits.        |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----------------|
| 1902 | ... | ... | ... | 15 % per annum. |
| 1903 | ... | ... | ..  | 15 % "          |
| 1904 | ... | ... | ... | 15 % "          |
| 1905 | ... | ... | ... | 10 % "          |
| 1906 | ... | ... | ... | 20 % "          |
| 1907 | ... | ... | ... | 30 % "          |
| 1908 | ... | ... | ... | 30 % "          |
| 1909 | ... | ... | ... | 30 % "          |
| 1910 | ... | ... | ... | 20 % "          |
| 1911 | ... | ..  | ... | 15 % "          |
| 1912 | ... | ... | ... | 20 % "          |
| 1913 | ... | ... | ... | 27 % ½ "        |
| 1914 | ... | ... | ... | 27 % ½ "        |
| 1915 | ... | ... | ..  | 27 % "          |
| 1916 | ..  | ... | ... | 30 % "          |
| 1917 | ... | ... | ... | 32 % "          |
| 1918 | ... | ... | ... | 30 % "          |
| 1919 | ... | ... | ... | 30 % "          |
| 1920 | ... | ... | ... | 30 % "          |

|      |     |     |     | Profits. |
|------|-----|-----|-----|----------|
| 1921 | ... | ... | ... | 30 % "   |
| 1922 | ... | ... | ... | 30 % "   |
| 1923 | ... | ... | ... | 30 % "   |
| 1924 | ... | ... | ... | 35 % "   |
| 1925 | ... | ... | ... | 35 % "   |
| 1926 | ... | ... | ... | 20 % "   |
| 1927 | ... | ... | ... | 20 % "   |

From these figures it appears that an original holder of £100 shares in this Company, to-day holds shares of the nominal value of £540 and of the market value of over £2,400, having in the period **Gold from Oil.** from 1902 to 1927 received dividends of over £1,600!!!

The following is the capital position of the Indo-Burmah Petroleum Company, formed in 1909 :—

|      |     |     |             | Ordinary Capital.                                           |
|------|-----|-----|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
|      |     |     |             | Rs.                                                         |
| 1909 | ... | ... | 75,00,000   |                                                             |
| 1911 | ... | ..  | 87,20,000   | (12,20,000 Subscribed.)                                     |
| 1912 | ... | ... | 93,38,000   | ( 6,18,000 Subscribed.)                                     |
| 1921 | ... | ... | 1,54,42,200 | (56,50,000 bonus.)<br>( 42,54,000 S <sup>E</sup> -scribed.) |
| 1922 | ... | ... | 1,55,95,000 |                                                             |
| 1925 | ... | ... | 95,26,100   |                                                             |
| 1926 | ... | ... | 68,61,800   | ( 9,35,700 bonus.)                                          |
|      |     |     |             | Preference Capital.                                         |
| 1927 | ..  | ... | 30,00,000   |                                                             |

In 1925 the capital was reduced, the shares in the Attock Oil Company held by the Indo-Burma Petroleum Company being distributed **Capital position.** to the shareholders. The dividends declared by this Company have ranged up to 75 per cent. in 1919, the average between 1911 and 1919 being just under 27 per cent.

The total capital of the Attock Oil Company, with capitalization of premia received on sale of shares, stands at a million and a half sterling. For 1923, a dividend of 6 per cent. was paid, and in 1924 a dividend of 10 per cent. One pound shares of this Company have ranged as high as 63 shillings and as low as 11 shillings.

The original capital of the British Burma Petroleum Company was 12½ million pounds but was reduced to 1 million pounds in 1914 by writing off 12 shillings a share. In November 1919, about half a million shares were issued at 8 shillings each, at a premium of 12 shillings each. The capital now stands at

£1,240,000 in 3,100,000 shares of 8 shillings each. All debentures have been paid off. The average dividend paid by this Company between 1916 and 1927 is between 9 and 10 per cent. The Burma Oil Company are the selling agents for this Company.

The Assam Oil Company was registered in 1909 and holds State leases of oil-bearing properties. The control of this Company passed to the Burma Oil Company in 1921. The total issued capital of this Company is £400,000. The Company has paid a steady dividend, which between 1917 and 1919 reached 8 per cent. Owing to extensive prospecting and development, no dividend has been paid since the Burma Oil Company took this concern over.

There is an arrangement between the principal concerns, *viz.* The Royal Dutch Shell Group The Burma Oil Company, The British

**How the pool works.** Burmah Petroleum Company, and the Assam Oil Company, under which they have created what is known as the Kerosene Pool. This Pool controls the prices and I can best describe its operations in the words of the Tariff Board :—

“ The principles governing the operation of the Pool have been explained to us as follows. In accordance with the maximum price policy of the Burmah Oil Company, 195,000 tons of inferior oil is sold to the Pool at a fixed price of Rs. 2-14-0 per unit of 8 gallons *plus* excise duty (8 annas). The contribution of 115,000 tons is distributed among the companies as follows : The contribution is only made in respect of kerosene in excess of that obtained from 1,000 barrels of crude oil a day. The quantity of inferior kerosene in excess of this is contributed to the Pool in proportion to the volume of the production. It is claimed that the balance of inferior kerosene and all superior kerosene is contributed at a price not above and generally below the price of imported oil. The contribution of imported superior kerosene from the Royal Dutch Shell Group is made at a price corresponding to world market values at the time, while inferior oil supplied by the same Company is purchased at 4 annas less per unit of 8 gallons. It is

**Effect on prices.**

claimed also that while the price of superior oil may fluctuate from one period to another above or below world parity, on the average the consumer obtains his kerosene well below world parity. The prices paid by the Pool to its contributors are fixed every half year. The details considered in fixing the import price are as

follows :—

- (a) The current price of f. o. b. American Gulf Port.
- (b) Transport charges.
- (c) Import duty.
- (d) Profit at 10 percent on (a) and (b).
- (e) Storage.

“ The oil received by the Pool from the different companies is frequently mixed before sale. It is then sold at prices which it is estimated will cover the price paid to the contributing companies by the Pool, a difference being maintained between the price of inferior and superior oil, which in 1927 stood at Rs. 1-6-0 per unit of 8 gallons. Any surplus or deficit in the price paid to the Pool over that period by the Pool is adjusted in the price fixed for the succeeding period of six months.”

The Standard Oil Company, having purchased oil from the Soviet Government of Russia was engaged right up to 1927 in a price war against the monopolists in India. Immediately this war was started, the indigenous group announced a reduction of one rupee per unit of 8 gallons. This was followed by a further out of four annas on the next day, and the total reductions reached Rs. 2-8-0 per unit in Bombay. Of course, different areas were differently affected, according as the Standard Oil Company was or was not effectively competing in those areas. The Standard Oil Company could compete because so long as it was not able to obtain its oil from nearer than the American Gulf Ports, it was not in a position to reduce the price, the freight from its ports being Re. 1-3-0 per ton, but it was different when it was in a position to obtain oil from Batoum, the freight from which was 11 annas per ton only.

Let me now, for a moment, refer to a matter of common honesty, which appears to have been sadly lacking in the attitude of some of the principal oil concerns in India. When a representation was made to the Government of India demanding protection for this industry, a joint note was sent up on the 15th December 1927 by indigenous oil companies referring to the rate war that had been launched. The Government were told in later representations that the rate war was a war “ between two foreign interests over an issue with which we have no concern.” This is what the British Burmah Petroleum Company said in their letter No. B-433, dated 9th April 1928 :—

“ We desire in the first place to emphasize the fact that we have no concern with the causes which have led up to the dispute between the Standard Oil Company of New York and the Royal Dutch Shell Group, nor had we any part

in the initiation of the kerosene rate war in which it culminated in September last and which is still being carried on. We are, however, unwillingly involved in its disastrous results, which at the least are likely to lead in our case to very serious embarrassment in the near future, unless some measure of relief or protection is afforded."

*Neither the Government of India, nor the Tariff Board appointed for the purpose of examining the question of grant of protection to this industry, were informed, until several days after the Tariff Board had been taking evidence, that the rate war had been actually started by the Asiatic Petroleum Company, with the knowledge and consent of the Burmah Oil Company and that the former had agreed to compensate the members of the Pool for losses that might be incurred as a result of the rate war.* In the Minority Report, the Chairman of the Tariff Board states that it is difficult for him not to find the members of the applicant companies, except the Indo Burma Petroleum Company, "guilty of a lack of candour amounting almost to deliberate malafides," The Chairman further states in his Minority Report that he was dissatisfied with the statistics and the evidence tendered by these applicant companies, meaning obviously that he could not believe the truth of the statements made by these companies in regard to their statistical position, prices, world parity, freight or even current prices of indigenous kerosene.

At Yenangyaung, the Burma Oil Company have erected their drilling machinery and pumps, and with the introduction of electrical energy there has resulted a great deal of unemployment, the workers getting about 10 days work per month, with the result that there are very few monthly wage-earners, most of them being paid on a daily basis. On the introduction of this change in 1927, there was an unsuccessful strike.

Some of the wells here are being worked day and night, some drillings have gone as deep as 4,000 feet. Even to-day in Burma many families own oil wells in the reserve. The oil is stored over-night in order to let the water settle down, and every morning it is drawn off, while the Government Supervisor inspects it and measures it to ascertain the royalty due to the Government. The oil thus produced is handed over to the Burma Oil Company who settle the price.

The figures of mortality in some of these industrial areas, as taken from the Public Health Report of 1927 are instructive. It must be noted that Yenangyaung is the oil centre in Burma. Myingyan is the cotton centre, whereas the other towns mentioned in the list are industrially important from the point of view of rice, timber and oil seed mills.

**Mortality  
figures.**

|              |     |     |     | Mortality Rate<br>per thousand |
|--------------|-----|-----|-----|--------------------------------|
| Rangoon Town | ... | ... | ... | 31'41                          |
| Mandalay     | ... | ... | ... | 41'16                          |
| Moulmein     | ..  | ... | ... | 26'17                          |
| Bassein      | ..  | ... | ..  | 41'60                          |
| Prome        | ... | ... | ... | 49'45                          |
| Yenangyaung  | ... | ... | ... | 39'94                          |
| Pegu         | ... | ... | ... | 42'46                          |
| Toungoo      | ... | ... | ... | 34'55                          |
| Myingyan     | ... | ... | ... | 40'99                          |

It must also be noted that the rural mortality rate is 18'85 as compared with the urban which is practically double being 36'52.

**Disgraceful housing conditions.** The housing of industrial workers in Burma, as stated by the representatives of Indian labour in Burma, is a disgrace.

"Married couples with just a piece of gunny bag or other rough curtain hung over a bed, have to sleep in the same room with rows of males married but without their wives, or non-married males lying in all directions. Small boys constitute a good proportion of the occupiers. The physical health of the lads must necessarily suffer; their mental and moral health must also suffer.

Prostitution and venereal disease are rampant."

Perhaps it would be advisable to take the case of the Burma Oil Company and its employees and deal with the conditions as evidenced at the various centres of the Burma Oils Fields. Under this Company's control are the main Yenangyaung-Rangoon Pipe Line, the Syrian Refinery and various other installations. This Company—one of the richest in India—was formed in 1871 in Glasgow and by the year 1886 it had extended its works which were capable of dealing with 200,000 gallons of crude oil per month. In that year King Theebaw was deposed and his territories were annexed by the Government of India; but the Government of India at that time recognized the private rights of ownership

of the Twinzayoes who held hereditary rights to all well sites and the native reserves of Twingone and Beme. The State preserved to itself merely the right of royalties on production. Leases were taken over from the proprietors by the Burma Oil Company and various other companies. Yenangyaung was the principal centre, and this centre in 1903 was connected by 10" pipe line, 275 miles

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\*Written Evidence before the Royal Commission on Labour, Volume: X, Part I., page 76.

long, with the refineries of the Company at Sriyam. The permanent labour force employed by this Company is 17,254. No public employment agencies exist, and about 47 per cent. of the labour is Burman, the rest being Indian or Chinese. Such is the pressure of unemployment that this Company states that they have a daily average of 1,500 men on their registers seeking employment\*. Thirty-two per cent of these registered for employment are accounted for by this Company under the heading "Retrenchment" and "Dismissals"—such is the sense of security enjoyed by the workers in the Oil Fields. And yet this Company, in view of the great distress caused by unemployment, states that employment insurance is not a desirable proposition.'

In spite of the immense fortunes won from oil by this Company, by the 31st August 1929, it had provided housing accommodation only for 53 per cent of the number employed.

The Chairman of the Burma Oil Co. Ltd. presiding over the 29th annual General Meeting of the Company on the 6th June, 1931, stated that last year he was in the happy position of being able to announce the raising of the dividend on ordinary shares from 20 per cent, at which it had stood for two years, to 30 per cent. He stated that in spite of political unrest and world-wide economic depression the Company were recommending a dividend of 2½ per cent for the last year. According to him the problem facing the Oil industry was the lack of balance between production and consumption. There has been a world-wide decline in demand. Arrangements subsisted between the Anglo-Persian Oil Co. Ltd. and the Royal Dutch-Shell Co. under which almost a complete monopoly was given to the Burma Oil Co., but imports from America and Russia were forcing their way into India and the Chairman hinted at the need for protecting this industry not, be it remarked, in the interest of the share-holders but in the interest of "the employment of the many thousands of Indians and Burmese for which the indigenous industry provides, and which is being menaced by these imports." In the cry for protection the Chairman quoted a Glasgow proverb "Gie our ain fishguts to our ain seamaws." Already there is a monopoly in India, but this demand for protection is instigated by the fear of American and Russian competition.

This Company in the year 1929 employed 38,000 direct employees, who receive about Rs. 2 lakhs of a month in wages. Through the Tin Plate Co.

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\*Ibid, p. 38.

†Ibid, p. 39.

‡Ibid, p. 40

of India Ltd., this Company provided employment for 8,000 workers whose wages are about Rs. 2 lakhs a year. Through the Burma Shell Oil Storage and Distributing Co. of India Ltd., 11,503 men were employed by the Company in distributing the indigenous production and were paid the sum of nearly Rs. 214,000 annually. In short direct employment in India and Burma was provided for 52,503 employees at a total cost of about Rs. 3,00,000 a month in wages or nearly £2,50,000 a year. A similar amount namely over £ 2,50,000 was represented in Profit and Loss account as profit and included the carry over of a sum for depreciation, the grand total of profit being about £ 3,50,000, out of which nearly £ 1,50,000 were distributed in dividends. The fact to be noted in regard to the balance-sheet for the last year of this Company is that £ 2,50,000 were paid in wages including salaries paid to high officials, whereas the profit was over £ 3,50,000. Further it must be remembered that 52,503 employees divided among them the total wages of less than Rs. 3,00,000 a month which gives an average of less than Rs. 6 per head.

These figures have been extracted from the Chairman's speech and if they are correct, as they necessarily must be, then we get an average wage of Rs. 6 a month for employment by a Company which even in the days of depression and world-wide slump is in a position to make a profit of over £ 3,00,000 and pay a dividend of 22½ per cent on its ordinary shares.

The hours of employment of drillers and driller helpers are 8 hour shifts and a 56 hour week; of the day workers a 56 hour week and a 10 hour day; of the well pullers the shift is the same as that of the drillers and the hours of work for day workers the same as for drillers. This also applies to Rigbuilders. Other labour, according to the Burma Oil Company puts in 56 hours a week and an 8 hour day. Only 20 per cent of the total employees do not work overtime. The actual average time worked on the basis of the first six months of 1921 was 8.57 hours per day or 49.42 hours per week. Fifteen per cent of the total employees work 7 days a week.

In regard to wages, it was until a strike in 1923 that a settlement was arrived at in regard to the rates to be paid to the workers, and since 1923 there has been no increase. A rough and ready method has been computed by this Company for what they call the payment of minimum wages, i.e., for a day's work one rupee, or less than two annas an hour. As I have already mentioned, the 1923 strike resulted in a wage agreement. The main demands put forward by the workers were an increase in wages, free housing or an allowance in lieu thereof, free water supply to all villagers, abolition of bribery and corruption in the Oilfields resorted to for the purpose of obtaining employment, and a reduction of the Thathameda tax. The average rates of wages in the Syriam Refinery, generally speaking, for the essential class of workers, as apart from fairly highly-skilled employees,

is between Rs. 20 to Rs. 35 a month. For instance, Apprentices get Rs. 26-13-0 per mensem, Cleaners Rs. 28-1-0, Oilmen Rs. 30-6-0, Pumpmen (all kinds) Rs. 34-3-0, Hammermen Rs. 27-6-0, Hoopers Rs. 20-5-0 and so on.

Men working on the standard and rotary drillings at Yenangyaung, if they are Burmans or Indians employed as drillers, get about Rs. 25 to Rs. 175 per month, but if they are Americans they get about Rs. 1,000 per month and if Scotsmen between Rs. 350 to Rs. 500.\*

A complaint was made that the Labour Department of the Burma Oil Company was practically the Government of the area in which it operated. This is what the Honorary Secretary of the Burma Labour Union said :—

“It (the Labour Department) has in its employ a secret agent who moves about the town and reports to the

**System of Spy- ing.** Labour Superintendent the activities of the workers. Consequently the men are

afraid of making any representations. They fear that if they do so they may be dispensed with. I have before me a notice served on one Maung San Myint by the Burma Oil Company on 22nd July 1925. It says ‘Services not required. Was given a month’s pay lieu of notice. Character good, ability good.†

This man was an active worker of the Union.

The representatives were asked why they did not have a properly constituted list of members and they replied : Whenever we started to do it there was some one after us.—So we cannot do our work openly. We ask for donations. The workers are afraid of dismissal because hundreds of employees have been dismissed for being members of our Union.” In fact, the charge was that the Labour Department sends its men round to collect information for supply to the Labour Bureau. A comic touch is not wanting in this tragedy. Even attending the funeral of one’s mother-in-law happens to have been a crime in the eyes of the Burma Oil Company, and names of those who attended such a funeral of the mother-in-law of the President of the Union, and gave donations, as is the custom in Burma, were taken down and reported to the Officer incharge.

How long will this rule of an oil state within the State continue ?

**An Oil State within the State.** No wonder the cry has gone up for the separation of Burma from India—not be it remarked in the interest of the expropriated Burman but in the interest of the all-powerful syndicates.

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\*Evidence before the Royal Commission on Labour Volume: X, Part. II, page 34.

†Ibid, p. 35

‡Ibid, p. 36.

# Labour Representation.

## STATISTICS.

The following table gives the present position of labour representation in the Central Legislative Assembly as well as in the Provincial Legislative Councils :—

**Table No. 1.**

| Legislative Body.              | Number of<br>seats<br>Provided<br>for by<br>nomination. | Total strength<br>of the<br>Legislature. | REMARKS.                                                                                 |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CENTRAL.                       |                                                         |                                          |                                                                                          |
| 1. Legislative Assembly        | 1                                                       | 143                                      | It is not obligatory upon the Government of India to make this nomination.               |
|                                |                                                         |                                          |                                                                                          |
| PROVINCIAL.                    |                                                         |                                          |                                                                                          |
| 1. Assam                       | 1                                                       | 14                                       | Nomination provided for by Rules made under Section 72-A of the Government of India Act. |
| 2. Bengal                      | 2                                                       | 138                                      |                                                                                          |
| 3. Bihar and Orisa             | 1                                                       | 100                                      |                                                                                          |
| 4. Bombay                      | 3                                                       | 114                                      |                                                                                          |
| 5. Burma                       | 1                                                       | 100                                      |                                                                                          |
| 6. Central Provinces and Berar | 1                                                       | 73                                       |                                                                                          |
| 7. The Punjab                  | 1                                                       | 93                                       |                                                                                          |

The following table gives the employers' representation in the Legislative Assembly.

**Table No. 2.**

| Province.               | Total strength of the Assembly. | NUMBER OF SEATS PROVIDED FOR CAPITAL. |               |                  |           | Percentage of Employer's representation to the total strength. |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------|------------------|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
|                         |                                 | Europeans.                            | Land-holders. | Indian commerce. | Total.    |                                                                |
| 1. Bengal ...           | ...                             | 4*                                    | 1             | 1                | 6         |                                                                |
| 2. Bombay ...           | ...                             | 2                                     | 1             | 2                | 5         |                                                                |
| 3. Madras ...           | ...                             | 1                                     | 1             | 1                | 3         |                                                                |
| 4. Bihar and Orisa ...  | ...                             |                                       | 1             | ...              | 2         |                                                                |
| 5. The Punjab ...       | ...                             |                                       | 1             | ...              | 1         |                                                                |
| 6. United Provinces ... | ...                             | 1                                     | 1             | ...              | 2         |                                                                |
| 7. Central ...          | ...                             | ...                                   | 1             | ...              | 2         |                                                                |
| 8. Assam ...            | ...                             | 1                                     | ...           | ...              | 1         |                                                                |
| 9. Burma ...            | ...                             | 1                                     | ...           | ...              | 1         |                                                                |
| <b>TOTAL ...</b>        | <b>143</b>                      | <b>10</b>                             | <b>7</b>      | <b>4</b>         | <b>21</b> | <b>14.6 p. c.</b>                                              |

\*One of these seats is given by nomination to the Associated Chambers of Commerce.

There are thus twenty-one seats in the Central Legislative Assembly provided for European and Indian capitalistic interests as against one seat for Indian working-class interests.

## MORE STATISTICS

The following table gives the employers' representation in the Provincial Legislatures :-

**Table No. 3.**

(Employers' Representation in the Provincial Legislatures).

| Province.                         | NUMBER OF SEATS PROVIDED FOR CAPITAL |               |                        |           |         |        | Total strength of the Legislature. | Percentage of employers' representation to total strength. |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------|------------------------|-----------|---------|--------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                   | Europeans.                           | Land-holders. | Commerce and industry. | Planting. | Mining. | Total. |                                    |                                                            |
| 1. Bengal ...                     | 5                                    | 4             | 15                     | ...       | ..      | 24     | 138                                | 17.4 %                                                     |
| 2. Bombay ...                     | 2                                    | 3             | 7                      | ...       | ...     | 12     | 114                                | 10.5 %                                                     |
| 3. Madras ...                     | 1                                    | 6             | 5                      | 1         | ...     | 13     | 130                                | 13 %                                                       |
| 4. Bihar and Orisa...             | 1                                    | 4             | 1                      | 1         | 1       | 8      | 100                                | 8 %                                                        |
| 5. United Provinces...            | 1                                    | 6             | 3                      | ...       | ...     | 10     | 123                                | 8.1 %                                                      |
| 6. The Punjab. ...                | ...                                  | 3             | 2                      | ...       | ...     | 5      | 93                                 | 5.3 %                                                      |
| 7. The Central Province and Berar | 1                                    | 1             | 1                      | ...       | 1       | 4      | 73                                 | 5.4 %                                                      |
| 8. Assam ...                      | ...                                  | ...           | 1                      | 5         | ...     | 6      | 54                                 | 11.1 %                                                     |
| 9. Burma ..                       | 1                                    | ...           | 3                      | ...       | ...     | 4      | 100                                | 4 %                                                        |
| TOTAL ...                         | 12                                   | 27            | 38                     | 7         | 2       | 86     | 925                                | 9.3 %                                                      |

(The Europeans' and land-holder's constituencies are included in the above list for the same reasons for which they are included in the list for Legislative Assembly).

## LABOUR

A comparison of those tables is given below, from which it will be seen that while the employers' representation is no where less than 4 %, labour representation is nowhere higher than 2.6 %, and that in the two Provinces, the employers of which enjoy representation to the extent of 10 % and 8.1 %, labour goes without any representation at all. It will be seen further that the employers are given 110 seats in the various Legislatures in India as against 11 seats allotted to Labour.

**Table No. 4.**

(Comparison of Employers' and Labour Representation in the Legislatures).

| LEGISLATURE.                   | Total strength. | Employers' representation. | Labour representation. | Percentage of employers' representation to total strength. | Percentage of Labour representation to total strength. |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>CENTRAL.</b>                |                 |                            |                        |                                                            |                                                        |
| Council of State               | 60              | 3                          | ...                    | 5 %                                                        | Nil                                                    |
| Legislative Assembly           | 143             | 21                         | 1                      | 14.6 %                                                     | 7 %                                                    |
| <b>PROVINCES.</b>              |                 |                            |                        |                                                            |                                                        |
| 1. Bengal                      | 138             | 24                         | 2                      | 17.4 %                                                     | 1.4 %                                                  |
| 2. Bombay                      | 114             | 12                         | 3                      | 10.5 %                                                     | 2.6 %                                                  |
| 3. Madras                      | 130             | 13                         | ...                    | 10 %                                                       | ...                                                    |
| 4. Bihar and Orisa             | 100             | 8                          | 1                      | 8 %                                                        | 1 %                                                    |
| 5. United Provinces            | 123             | 10                         | ...                    | 8.1 %                                                      | ...                                                    |
| 6. The Punjab                  | 93              | 5                          | 1                      | 5.3 %                                                      | 1 %                                                    |
| 7. Central Provinces and Berar | 73              | 4                          | 1                      | 5.4 %                                                      | 1.4 %                                                  |
| 8. Assam                       | 54              | 6                          | 1                      | 11.1 %                                                     | 1.9 %                                                  |
| 9. Burma                       | 100             | 4                          | 1                      | 4 %                                                        | 1 %                                                    |









